THE NINE FLOWER HOUSES OF MANHATTAN

A Register of Their Speech, Their Seasons, and Their Children

SURJAN

WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

MMXXVI

The Department of Buildings of the City of New York

Register of Flowering Structures · Volumes I and II

A thing that returns is only impressive if you have watched it go.

— the Keeper, in the eleventh year

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FOREWORD

By Ileana Cortázar-Weiss, Ph.D., of the Botanical Garden, who was asked for an opinion in the fourth year and gave the wrong one.

I am the woman in Chapter Ten who says, in a tone the Keeper still resents, that of course they were exchanging pollen, that a bee will work half a mile without complaint, and that this was not communication, it was agriculture.

I said that. I said it in April of the fourth year, in a corridor, to two men from the Department of Buildings who had come to me with a table written on the back of a menu, and I said it in about eleven seconds, and I did not look at the table.

I have been asked to write this foreword and I have agreed on one condition, which is that I be allowed to begin with that.

Because the sentence I said in the corridor was true. Everything in it is true. Bombus impatiens will forage at eight hundred metres and further under pressure; pollen transfer between spatially separated conspecifics is the most ordinary event in botany; and if you show a plant scientist two buildings that have acquired the same species in the same season she will tell you that a bee did it, and she will be right, and I was.

What I did not do was ask the second question. And the second question is the whole of this book, and a woman with no training whatever had already asked it, in ballpoint, on the back of a menu, and it was in my hand while I was talking.

The second question is: in what order?

I want to set out plainly, for readers who are not botanists, why this matters, because it is the only thing I can usefully contribute and the Keeper has been too generous about it in his own chapters.

A mechanism produces a distribution. If bees are moving pollen among nine sites in a city, the result over four years is a smear. Some pairs exchange a great deal, some exchange nothing, the amount falls off with distance and rises with reward, and if you plot it you get a cloud. That is what agriculture looks like. That is what I was picturing while I talked in the corridor.

A channel produces a latency. If the same species arrives at site B a fixed number of days after site A, and at site C a different fixed number of days after that, and if those numbers hold across seasons, across species, across weather, and across four years — then you are not looking at a cloud.

You are looking at a network with routes in it, and routes have lengths, and lengths are measurable, and a measurable length between two points is the definition of a channel and not of a smear.

Eleven days on the bee routes. Twenty-one on the root. Six weeks through the rock. Ninety seconds in the tunnels.

Those four numbers are the entire scientific content of this book and they were established by a dispatcher who had spent nineteen years holding sequences in her head, and rejected by a plant scientist who had spent twenty-two years holding mechanisms in hers, and I would like every young person in my field to read that sentence twice.

I have now spent seven years on this. My paper on the severance at Delancey Street is eleven pages long and the Keeper tells me he has framed its conclusion, which I find embarrassing and will not ask him to take down. The conclusion is that the mechanism is not understood, that the observation is not in doubt, and that these two facts are going to have to sit next to each other for a while.

They are still sitting next to each other. I do not expect to resolve them. I have a graduate student who thinks she will, and I hope she is right, and I have told her that if she is she must go and find the menu, which is in a drawer on the ninth floor of a building on Chambers Street and has never been photocopied.

Now I want to say something that is not science, and I am going to mark it clearly as such so that nobody quotes it as though it were.

I do not think these buildings are speaking to each other in the sense that you and I are speaking. I do not think there is anything in a wall of flowers that intends. I want that on the record before the rest of it.

And: there are nine structures in this city that exchange material along measurable routes with characteristic latencies, that adopt one another's species in a fixed order, that produce further structures which no person designed, and that do all of this on a seasonal cycle which several hundred unpaid volunteers have documented to a standard I would accept in a journal.

If a system does everything that communication does, at every scale I am able to measure, and I decline to call it communication solely because I cannot find anybody inside it who means to be doing it — then I have not made a scientific statement. I have made a decision about what I am prepared to be surprised by.

I made that decision once already, in a corridor, in eleven seconds, holding the evidence in my hand.

I am not going to make it twice.

What follows is not a scientific document and does not pretend to be. It is a municipal register kept for eleven years by a clerk who added three fields to a form without authority, framed by an architect who built three of the nine houses and has never been inside any of the others, and it is the most careful long observation of a living system I have read in my professional life.

Read the introduction, which is about grief and is honest about it. Read the chapter on the root network, which contains an observation I cannot account for and have therefore not argued with. Read the January page.

And then go in February, as he tells you to, and look at the lath, and understand that you are looking at the thing itself and not at its display — which is a distinction my whole discipline is built on and which a clerk of the Department of Buildings arrived at by standing in the cold with a clipboard.

ILEANA CORTÁZAR-WEISS

THE BOTANICAL GARDEN · MARCH

INTRODUCTION

By Surjan. Written at the end of the year, away from the island, with the drawings finished and the file closed.

I did not set out to build anything out of flowers. I set out to build something that could be lost.

This is a difficult sentence to put at the front of a book that is otherwise about municipal forms and bee routes, so let me put it plainly and then get out of the way, because the Keeper is a better writer than I am and the nine houses are better than either of us.

The project began with a death. I am not going to describe it; it is not that kind of book and it was not that kind of death, which is to say it was ordinary, and expected, and took eleven months, and I was there for most of it and not for the end. What I want to record about it is only this: that in the year afterwards I found I could not look at permanent things. Stone offended me. There was a granite bank at the end of my street and I would walk past it and feel actual anger at the stone, at the confidence of it, at a building that had decided in 1924 that it would simply go on and had been proved right.

I understand that this is not a reasonable position and that granite has done nothing wrong. But grief makes an architect strange about materials, and I had a year of it, and what came out at the end of that year was a drawing of a small white box with a hole in it, standing on grass, covered entirely in flowers, and next to it in my own handwriting the words: it is allowed to end.

That is the whole origin of the nine houses and I have never been able to improve on it.

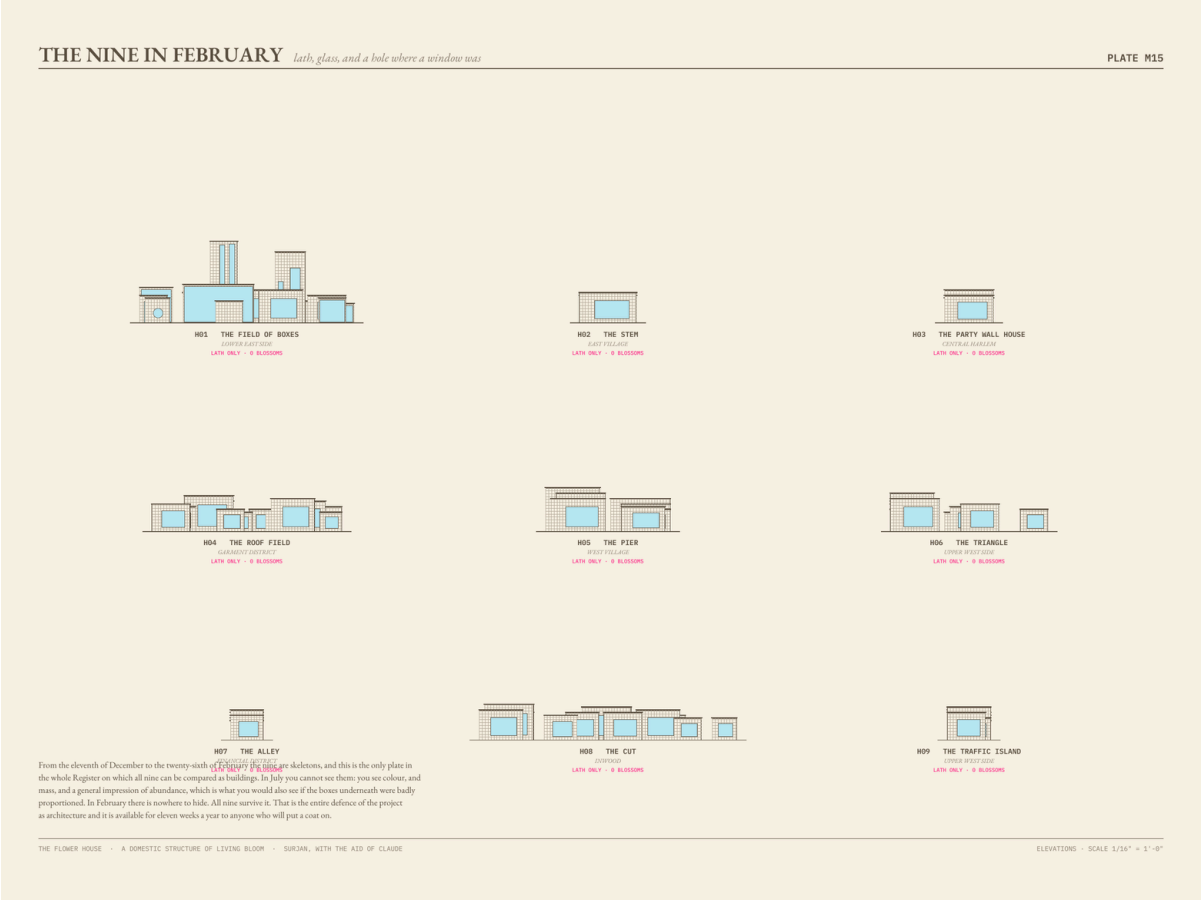

THE NINE IN FEBRUARY
lath, glass, and a hole where a window was
PLATE M15
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES
LOWER EAST SIDE
LATH ONLY · 0 BLOSSOMS
H02 THE STEM
EAST VILLAGE
LATH ONLY · 0 BLOSSOMS
H03 THE PARTY WALL HOUSE
CENTRAL HARLEM
LATH ONLY · 0 BLOSSOMS
H04 THE ROOF FIELD
GARMENT DISTRICT
LATH ONLY · 0 BLOSSOMS
H05 THE PIER
WEST VILLAGE
LATH ONLY · 0 BLOSSOMS
H06 THE TRIANGLE
UPPER WEST SIDE
LATH ONLY · 0 BLOSSOMS
H07 THE ALLEY
GREENWICH VILLAGE
LATH ONLY · 0 BLOSSOMS
H08 THE CUT
DUMBO
LATH ONLY · 0 BLOSSOMS
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
UPPER WEST SIDE
LATH ONLY · 0 BLOSSOMS
From the eleventh of December to the twenty-sixth of February the nine are skeletons, and this is the only plate in the whole Register on which all nine can be compared as buildings. In July you cannot see them: you see colour, and mass, and a general impression of abundance, which is what you would also see if the boxes underneath were badly proportioned. In February there is nowhere to hide. All nine survive it. That is the entire defence of the project as architecture and it is available for eleven weeks a year to anyone who will put a coat on.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
ELEVATIONS · SCALE 1/16" = 1'-0"

PLATE M15 · THE NINE IN FEBRUARY. Lath, glass, and a hole where a window was. This is the only plate on which all nine can be compared as buildings.

Everything else followed from that first note, and followed fast, and followed with the peculiar cheerfulness that grief produces when it is finally given something to do. If the building is allowed to end, then it must end visibly, in public, on a schedule, so that ending is not a failure but a season. If it ends every year then it must return every year, which means it must be made of something that returns, which means flowers, which means the whole surface of it and not a window box. If the surface is entirely flowers then the wall can be very thin, because it is carrying only flowers, which means three and a half inches, which means the rooms must be small, which means there must be many of them, which means they cannot all be under one roof, which means there are no corridors, which means you go outside to go to bed.

Every decision in this project is the previous decision, taken seriously. I want that on the record, because people who write about the nine houses tend to describe them as whimsical and they are the opposite of whimsical. They are the most rigidly logical buildings I have ever made. The whimsy is entirely in the premise. The rest is arithmetic.

I should say something about the boxes, because that is the question I get from architects rather than from the public.

The first two schemes were not boxes. The first was a single circular house of bamboo and lotus, one roof, one plan, radially symmetrical, and it was beautiful in the drawings and completely wrong, because a radial plan has a centre and a centre is a claim of permanence. The second was a cluster of swollen pods, thirteen of them, which was better because it had no centre, but the pods were shaped and a shaped volume is an opinion, and I did not want to have an opinion about a house that was going to be re-clad by insects every spring.

So: boxes. Rectangles. The least interesting shape available, chosen precisely because it is the least interesting, so that the flowers would have nothing to compete with. Every box is a different size and every box is the same idea, and the moment I drew them scattered on a lot three feet apart instead of joined into a plan, the project stopped being a building and became a place, and I knew it was finished.

And then the openings, which took two more years and which I got wrong for most of them.

My first fenestration was uniform: one language of opening applied consistently across all seventeen volumes, which is what one is trained to do and is what makes a facade read as a facade. It was correct and it was dead. What is on these houses now is twelve unrelated kinds of hole — a full glass wall next to a wall with nothing in it at all, a round window, a scatter of small squares, a slot that stops short of the corner, a pair of tall openings of deliberately unequal width — assigned so that no box repeats itself on its own four faces and no head line runs from one box to the next.

This is not composition. It is the refusal of composition, and it is the only way I know to make a wall that is covered in eleven thousand symmetrical objects not look like wallpaper. The blossom is perfectly ordered at the scale of your hand. The wall must therefore be perfectly disordered at the scale of the room, or the whole thing collapses into pattern, and pattern is the enemy of this project because pattern is a promise and I had promised not to promise anything.

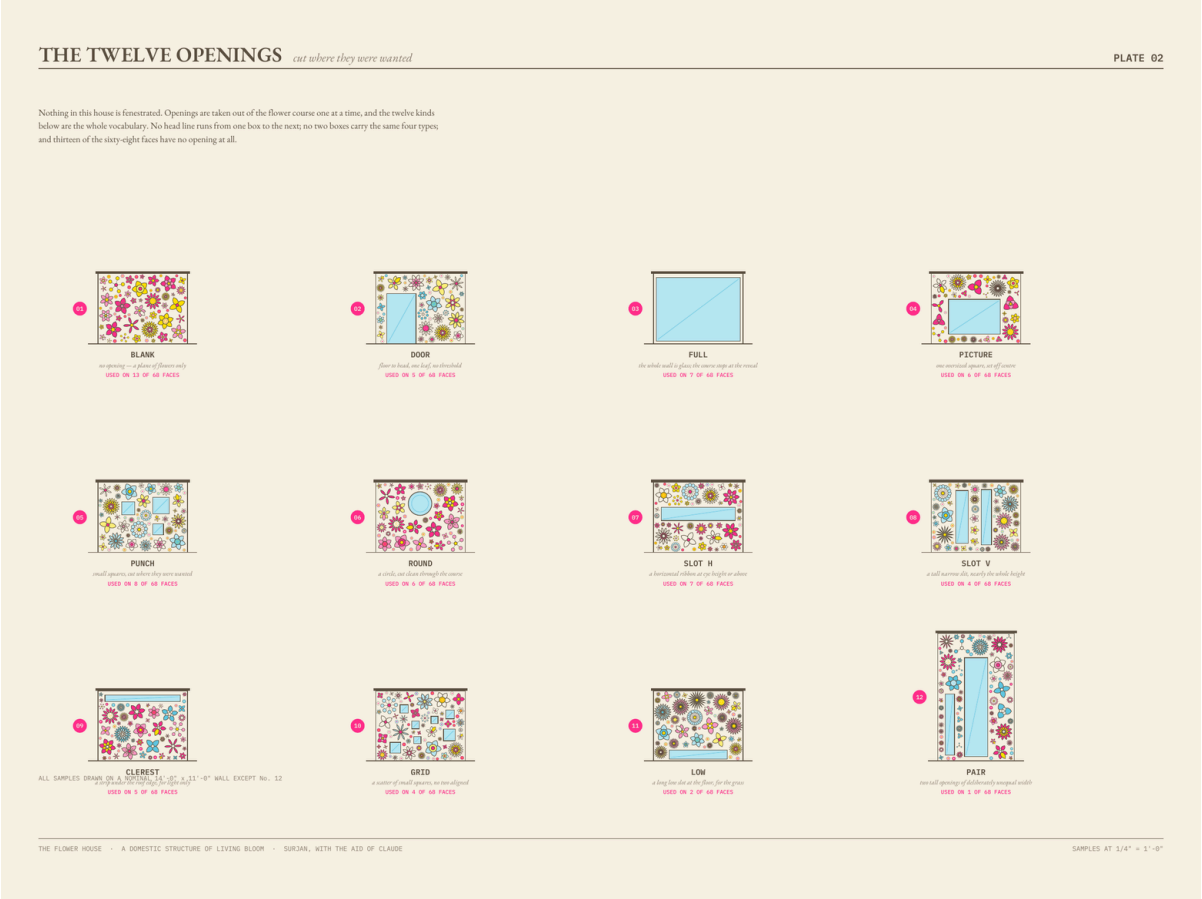

THE TWELVE OPENINGS cut where they were wanted
PLATE 02
Nothing in this house is fenestrated. Openings are taken out of the flower course one at a time, and the twelve kinds below are the whole vocabulary. No head line runs from one box to the next; no two boxes carry the same four types; and thirteen of the sixty-eight faces have no opening at all.
01 BLANK
no opening — a piece of flowers only
USED ON 13 OF 68 FACES
02 DOOR
floor to head, one leaf, no threshold
USED ON 5 OF 68 FACES
03 FULL
the whole wall is glass; the course stops at the reveal
USED ON 7 OF 68 FACES
04 PICTURE
one oversized square, set off centre
USED ON 6 OF 68 FACES
05 PUNCH
small squares, cut where they were wanted
USED ON 8 OF 68 FACES
06 ROUND
a circle, cut clean through the course
USED ON 6 OF 68 FACES
07 SLOT H
a horizontal ribbon at eye height or above
USED ON 7 OF 68 FACES
08 SLOT V
a tall narrow slit, nearly the whole height
USED ON 4 OF 68 FACES
09 CLEREST
a band under the roof slope, for light only
USED ON 5 OF 68 FACES
10 GRID
a scatter of small squares, no two aligned
USED ON 4 OF 68 FACES
11 LOW
a long low slot at the floor, for the grass
USED ON 2 OF 68 FACES
12 PAIR
two tall openings of deliberately unequal width
USED ON 1 OF 68 FACES
ALL SAMPLES DRAWN ON A NOMINAL 14'-0" x 11'-0" WALL EXCEPT No. 12
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SAMPLES AT 1/4" = 1'-0"

PLATE 02 · THE TWELVE OPENINGS. Thirteen of the sixty-eight faces are blank. A wall with no window in it is a decision and has to be signed for.

Now: what I did not do, and what this book is actually about.

I did not design nine houses. I designed one and it was built at Broome Street in the second year, and the other eight were commissioned by other people, on other lots, over the following six years, by four different architects of whom I know two. I designed the Field of Boxes, the Alley and the Cut. I had nothing to do with the Roof Field, which is better than any of mine, and nothing to do with the Traffic Island, which I argued against in writing, twice, and was wrong about.

I did not know they would talk to each other. Nobody knew. It was found by a car dispatcher on Rivington Street who noticed an ordering and wrote it down on the back of a menu, and every professional body in this city ignored her for two years including me, and I would like this paragraph to be the closest thing to an apology that the Register will admit.

I did not know they would have children. Nobody knows how that works. I have read the eight forms and I have stood under the viaduct at Twentieth Street looking at four small white volumes

that no one drew, and I have no professional opinion to offer, which is a strange sentence for a man with a licence to write.

And I certainly did not know that the city would take them. That is the part that has undone me and it is the part I want to hand over to the Keeper now, because he has watched it more carefully than I have and from a better position, which is a room and a half on the ninth floor of a building on Chambers Street with a form in it that has forty-three fields.

I have only this to add, and then the book begins.

I built a thing that was allowed to end, because I could not bear a thing that would not. And a city of nine million people looked at it and did not find it morbid. They found it a reason to gather. They put it on a tea towel. They started a waiting list eleven years long for four minutes inside an alley. They telephoned a municipal office six hundred and ten times to ask whether a roof they cannot see was all right.

Grief turned inside out and made public is not grief any more. It has another name and I have spent four years trying not to use it in print because it sounds like a slogan, and I am going to use it once, here, and then not again.

It is joy. That is what this is. It is the loudest and most public joy I know how to build, and it works only because the ending is real — because in the second week of December the last of the course comes off the Traffic Island in a wind off the river and about thirty people stand on the median in the dark and watch a building stop, and every single one of them knows it will be back in May, and stays anyway, because the watching is the point.

SURJAN

A NOTE ON THIS REGISTER

Being the preface of the Keeper, written in the eleventh year, in the eleven weeks when nothing was said.

I am not an architect. I want that on the first page, in the first line, so that nobody reads further under a misunderstanding. I am a clerk of the Department of Flowering Structures, which is a room and a half on the ninth floor of a building on Chambers Street, and I have kept this Register since the second year, when there were four houses and no one had yet noticed that they were listening to each other.

The Register is a municipal document and has a municipal purpose. It records nine buildings: their lots, their volumes, their species, their openings, their dates of flower and their dates of failure. It exists because a building that is made of living tissue cannot be inspected the way a building made of brick is inspected, and somebody had to invent the form. I invented the form. It has forty-one fields. I have filled it out, by hand, four times a year, for eleven years, and in that time it has become something other than a form, which is a thing that happens to forms and to the people who keep them.

What it has become is this book.

I should say at once what the nine houses are, in the plainest language I have. They are boxes. Each house is a scatter of small rectangular volumes set down on a piece of ground the city had finished with, three feet apart, orthogonal, flat-roofed, and never touching. The walls are three and a half inches thick — an outer course of flowers, a woven bast lath, an inner course of flowers, and nothing at all in between. The openings are cut where they were wanted. There are no corridors anywhere in any of them: to go from your kitchen to your bed you go outside, across the grass, in whatever the weather is doing.

And they are made of flowers. Two hundred and sixty-four species, scheduled and numbered, laid shoulder to shoulder on every surface: every wall, every roof, every soffit. Each blossom is radially symmetrical and none of the arrangements is. The whole of it is alive, which means the whole of it flowers and the whole of it dies, on a schedule, in public, every year.

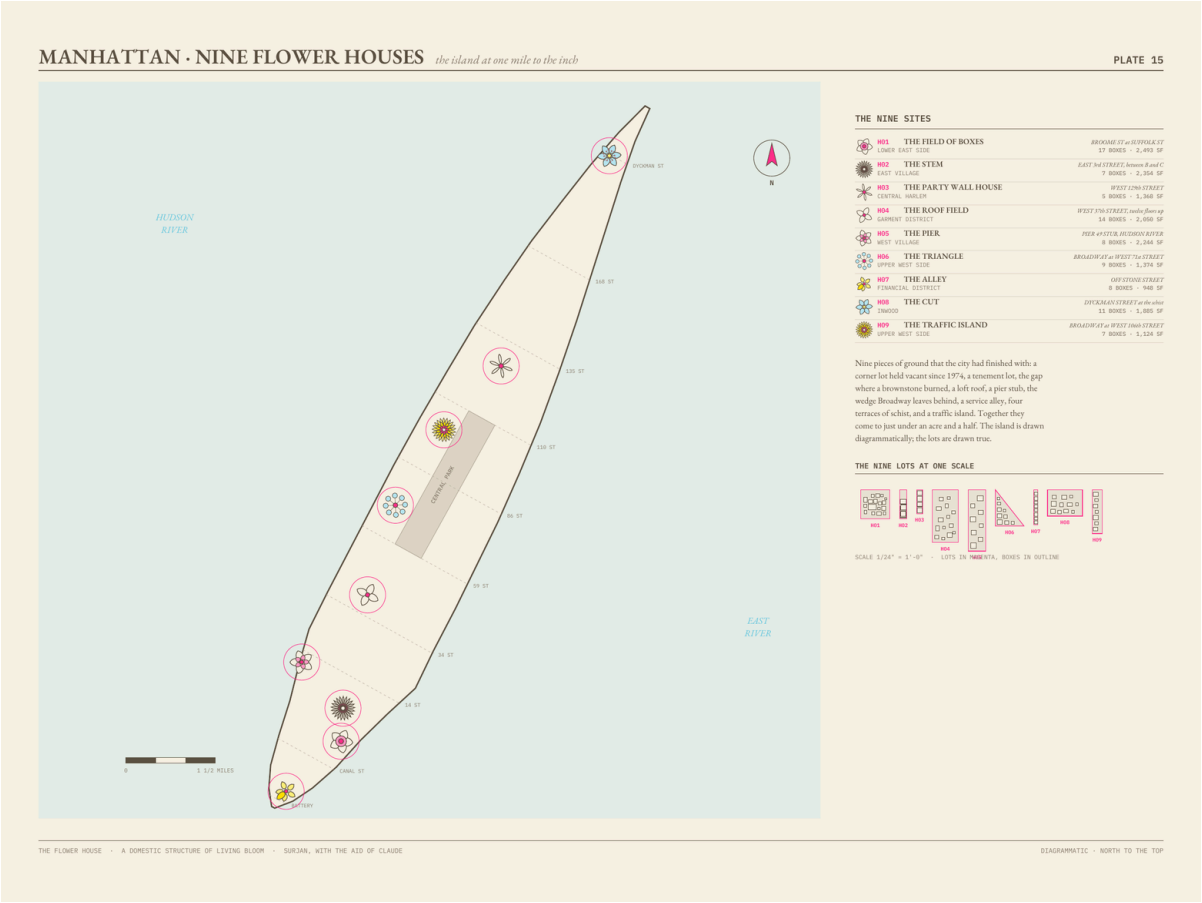

MANHATTAN · NINE FLOWER HOUSES
the island at one mile to the inch
PLATE 15
HUDSON RIVER
EAST RIVER
CENTRAL PARK
168 ST
135 ST
110 ST
86 ST
59 ST
34 ST
CANAL ST
BATTERY
DYCKMAN ST
N
0
1 1/2 MILES
THE NINE SITES
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES
LOWER EAST SIDE
BROOME ST at SUPPOLK ST
17 BOXES · 2,493 SF
H02 THE STEM
EAST VILLAGE
EAST 3rd STREET, between B and C
7 BOXES · 2,354 SF
H03 THE PARTY WALL HOUSE
CENTRAL HARLEM
WEST 129th STREET
5 BOXES · 1,368 SF
H04 THE ROOF FIELD
GARMENT DISTRICT
WEST 37th STREET, twelve floors up
14 BOXES · 2,050 SF
H05 THE PIER
WEST VILLAGE
PIER 40 FOOT, HUDSON RIVER
8 BOXES · 2,244 SF
H06 THE TRIANGLE
UPPER WEST SIDE
BROADWAY at WEST 72d STREET
9 BOXES · 1,374 SF
H07 THE ALLEY
FINANCIAL DISTRICT
OFF STONE STREET
8 BOXES · 948 SF
H08 THE CUT
INWOOD
DYCKMAN STREET at the schist
11 BOXES · 1,805 SF
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
UPPER WEST SIDE
BROADWAY at WEST 106th STREET
7 BOXES · 1,124 SF
Nine pieces of ground that the city had finished with: a corner lot held vacant since 1974, a tenement lot, the gap where a brownstone burned, a loft roof, a pier stub, the wedge Broadway leaves behind, a service alley, four terraces of schist, and a traffic island. Together they come to just under an acre and a half. The island is drawn diagrammatically; the lots are drawn true.
THE NINE LOTS AT ONE SCALE
H01
H02
H03
H04
H05
H06
H07
H08
H09
SCALE 1/24" = 1'-0" · LOTS IN MAGENTA, BOXES IN OUTLINE
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DIAGRAMMATIC · NORTH TO THE TOP

PLATE 15 · MANHATTAN, WITH THE NINE. The island is drawn diagrammatically; the lots are drawn true.

There is a question I am asked more than any other, usually by people from out of the city, and it is always asked in the same slightly aggrieved tone. Why would anyone build a house that stops working in December?

I used to answer with the technical case: the lath is permanent, the frame is permanent, the rooflights are permanent, only the course goes; the cost of recladding is one afternoon and a hundred and forty dollars of seed; the houses are warm because they are small and because the rooms are separate, and the separate rooms are why the corridor is unnecessary and why the corridor's absence is not a hardship. All of this is true and none of it is an answer.

The answer is that a thing which returns is only impressive if you have watched it go.

I have watched it go eleven times. In the second week of December the last of the Traffic Island comes down in a wind off the river and the nine houses stand as lath and glass and rooflight and nothing else, and the city walks past them at speed with its collar up. In the last week of February the Roof Field, which is highest and therefore warmest, puts up its first crown species eleven storeys above West Thirty-Seventh Street, where nobody can see it, and tells the other eight.

That is the part of this book that matters. They tell each other.

I did not discover it and I do not claim to have. It was discovered by a woman named Adela Quinn who was not employed by the Department and who was, at the time, forty-eight and unemployed generally, and who noticed in the fourth year that the Field of Boxes on Broome Street and the Stem on East Third Street were adopting each other's species in a fixed order with a lag of about eleven days. She wrote to us. We ignored her. She wrote again with a table. I have that table. It is the first document in the Register and it is in ballpoint on the back of a menu.

There are now seven attested modes by which the nine communicate, eighteen attested channels, and a matrix which I will set out in its place. There are nine feast days, none of them declared by any authority, all of them arrived at by the simple method of people turning up. There are eight seedlings, which is to say eight further houses that came up in the seasons after two of the nine had been in flower at once and in sight of one another, and which nobody commissioned, sited, drew or approved. And there is a tenth house, which does not exist, which all nine of them have been describing to each other for eleven years, and which I have attempted to draw at the end of this volume although I have no authority to and no confidence that I have got it right.

I want to say one more thing before the nine begin, and it is not a municipal thing.

I go and look at them. Not to inspect them; I do that too, on a schedule, with a clipboard and a ladder. I mean that on my own time, in my own coat, I go and stand across the street from them, and so does most of this city at one time or another, and the thing we are all standing there doing has a name, and the name is pride.

It is a strange word to apply to a building you do not own, cannot enter, and had no hand in making. But there is no other word. When the Alley opens in the second week of August — fourteen feet wide, a hundred and twenty long, eight boxes in single file with the sky arriving as a long grey strip — there are two thousand people on Stone Street and Pearl Street who have come to look at a house they will never be inside, and they have brought their children, and they are pointing.

I am one of them. I bring my daughter. She is fourteen and thinks the whole thing is embarrassing, which is correct, and she comes every year.

BOOK ONE · THE NINE

In which each house is described in the order it was built, with its lot, its rooms, and what may be said of its character.

I. Broome Street, or The Field of Boxes

The first house stands on a hundred-foot square at the corner of Broome and Suffolk which had held nothing but ailanthus and a chain fence since 1974. It is the largest of the nine, the most visited, the most photographed, and — I say this with the affection one reserves for a difficult eldest child — the least interesting to talk to.

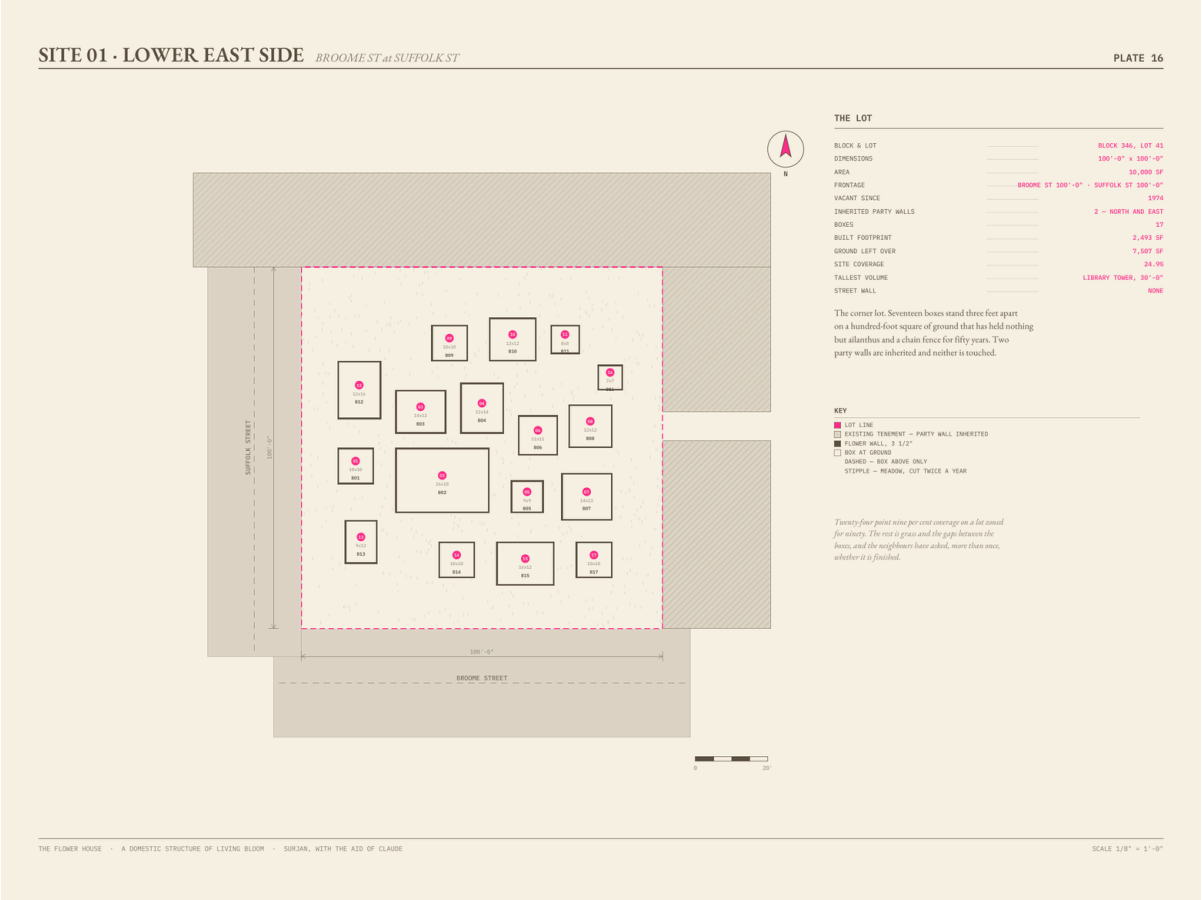
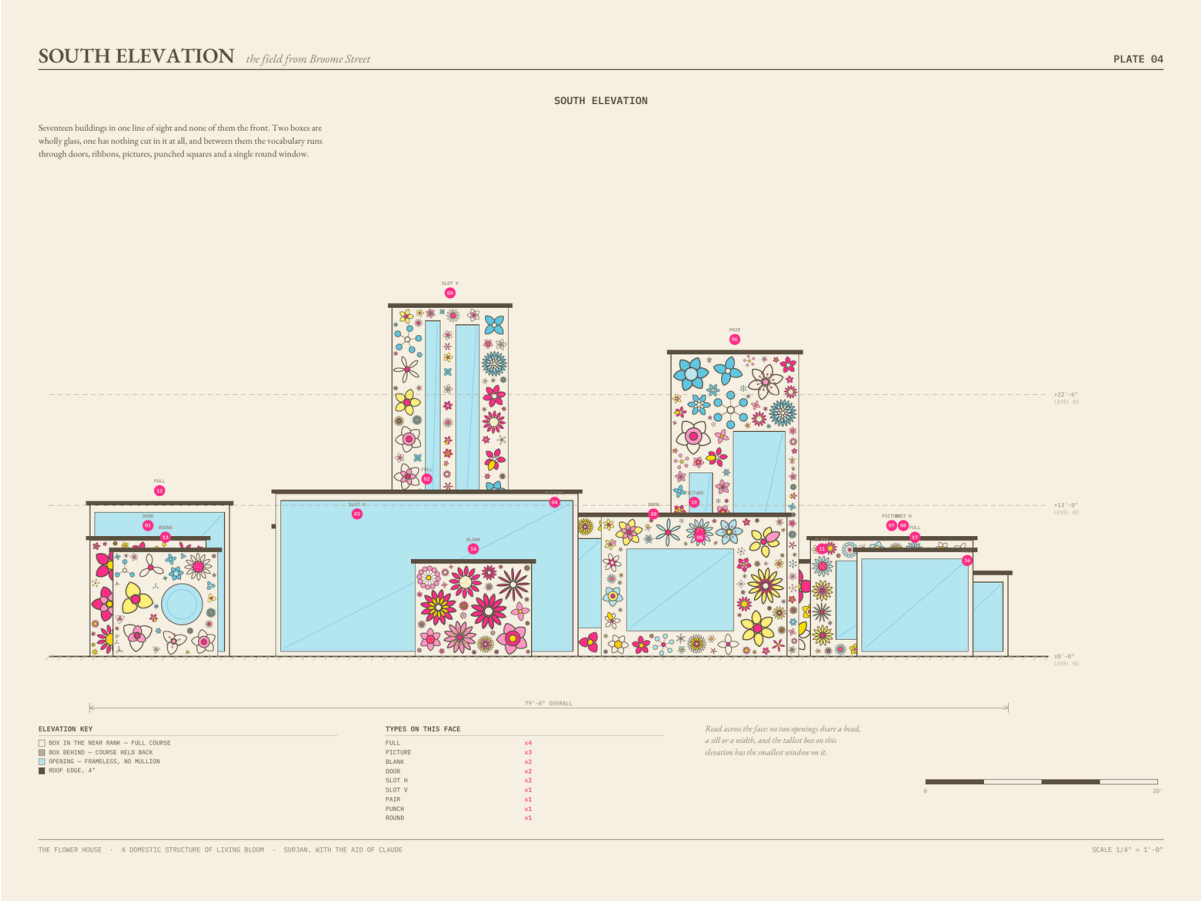

SITE 01 · LOWER EAST SIDE
BROOME ST at SUFFOLK ST
PLATE 16
THE LOT
BLOCK & LOT — BLOCK 346, LOT 41
DIMENSIONS — 100'-0" x 100'-0"
AREA — 10,000 SF
FRONTAGE — BROOME ST 100'-0" · SUFFOLK ST 100'-0"
VACANT SINCE — 1974
INHERITED PARTY WALLS — 2 — NORTH AND EAST
BOXES — 17
BUILT FOOTPRINT — 2,493 SF
GROUND LEFT OVER — 7,507 SF
SITE COVERAGE — 24.9%
TALLEST VOLUME — LIBRARY TOWER, 30'-0"
STREET WALL — NONE
The corner lot. Seventeen boxes stand three feet apart on a hundred-foot square of ground that has held nothing but ailanthus and a chain fence for fifty years. Two party walls are inherited and neither is touched.
KEY
LOT LINE
EXISTING TENEMENT — Pparty wall inherited
FLOWER WALL, 3 1/2"
BOX AT GROUND
DASHED — BOX ABOVE ONLY
STIPPLE — MEADOW, CUT TWICE A YEAR
Twenty-four point nine per cent coverage on a lot zoned for ninety. The rest is grass and the gaps between the boxes, and the neighbours have asked, more than once, whether it is finished.
SUFFOLK STREET
BROOME STREET
N
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

PLATE 16 · SITE 01, LOWER EAST SIDE. Block 346, Lot 41. Coverage 24.9 per cent on a lot zoned for ninety.

Seventeen boxes. The Long Room, which is twenty-six by eighteen and is the largest volume in the project. The Kitchen Box and the Dining Box, which are separate and stand eight feet apart, so that

a dish carried from one to the other crosses open ground twice a day for a hundred and eighty days a year and is carried in a covered pot for the rest. The Sleeping Corolla — no; I am confusing it with an earlier scheme. The Bedrooms, which are called One and Two, and which nobody has ever managed to give better names to. The Study Tower at twenty-six feet, the Library Tower at thirty, standing forty-one feet apart and never touching. The Small Box, which is seven feet square and holds one chair. And the Pavilion, which is glazed on all four faces, contains nothing whatever, and is where everyone in the family goes to be alone.

Two party walls were inherited, north and east, and neither was touched. The flower course is held half an inch clear of the old brick for its full height, so the joint is visible, drains to the grass, and can be inspected from the ground with a torch, which is the sort of decision that looks like modesty and is in fact enormous pride.


SOUTH ELEVATION
the field from Broome Street
PLATE 04
SOUTH ELEVATION
Seventeen buildings in one line of sight and none of them the front. Two boxes are wholly glass, one has nothing cut in it at all, and between them the vocabulary runs through doors, ribbons, pictures, punched squares and a single round window.
79'-0" OVERALL
ELEVATION KEY
BOX IN THE NEAR RANK — FULL COURSE
BOX BEHIND — COURSE HELD BACK
OPENING — FRAMELESS, NO MULLION
ROOF EDGE, 4"
TYPES ON THIS FACE
FULL x4
PICTURE x3
BLANK x2
DOOR x2
SLOT H x2
SLOT V x1
PAIR x1
PUNCH x1
ROUND x1
Read across the face: no two openings share a head, a sill or a width, and the tallest box on this elevation has the smallest window on it.
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SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

PLATE 04 · SOUTH ELEVATION. Two boxes wholly glass, one with nothing cut in it at all.

What is remarkable about the Field of Boxes, and what the photographs never carry, is how much of it is grass. Coverage is under twenty-five per cent. The neighbours have asked, more than once and in writing, whether it is finished.

It is the eldest and it behaves like one. On the root channel it is nearly always the house that says begin. On the fourteenth of February, in most years, it puts out the same message to all eight of the others: twenty-two days to the Traffic Island, begin. It is not always right. It has never once been corrected.

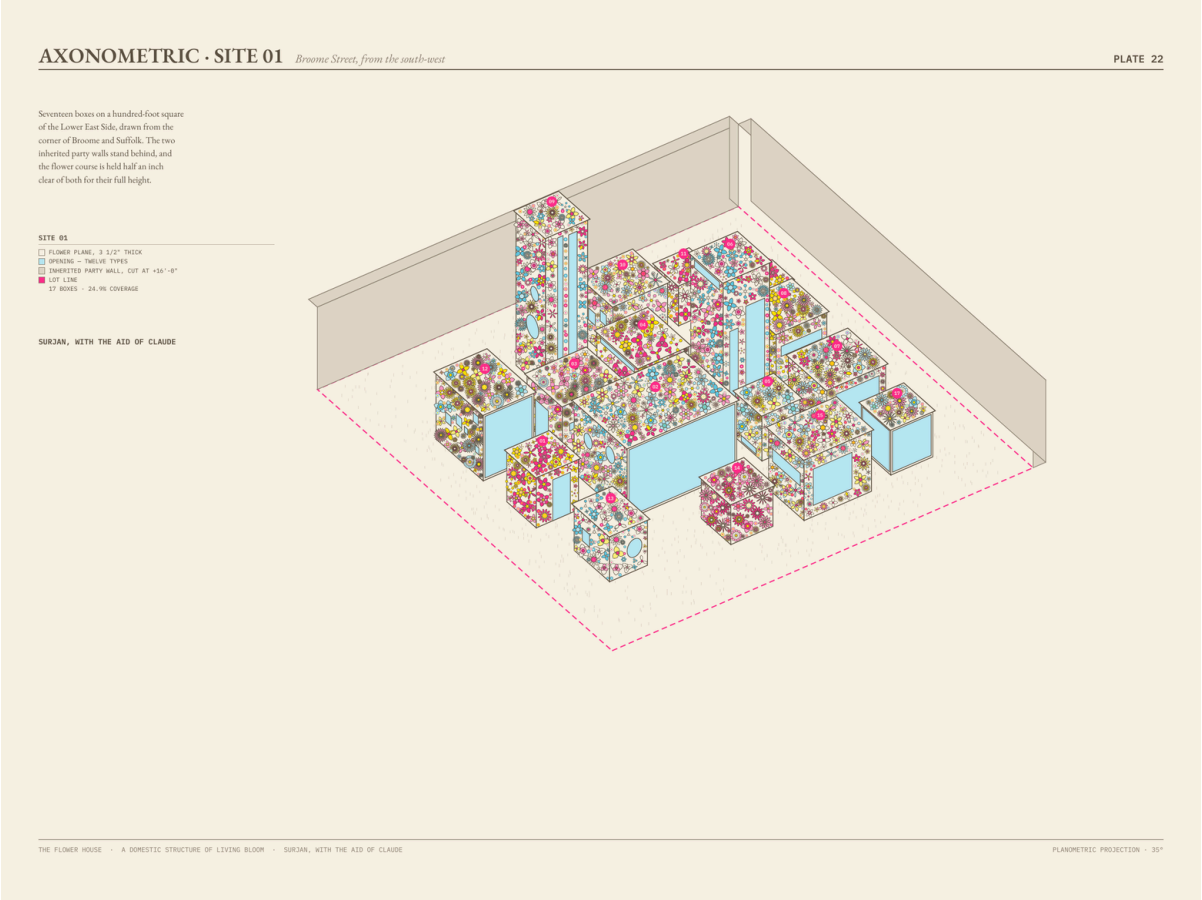
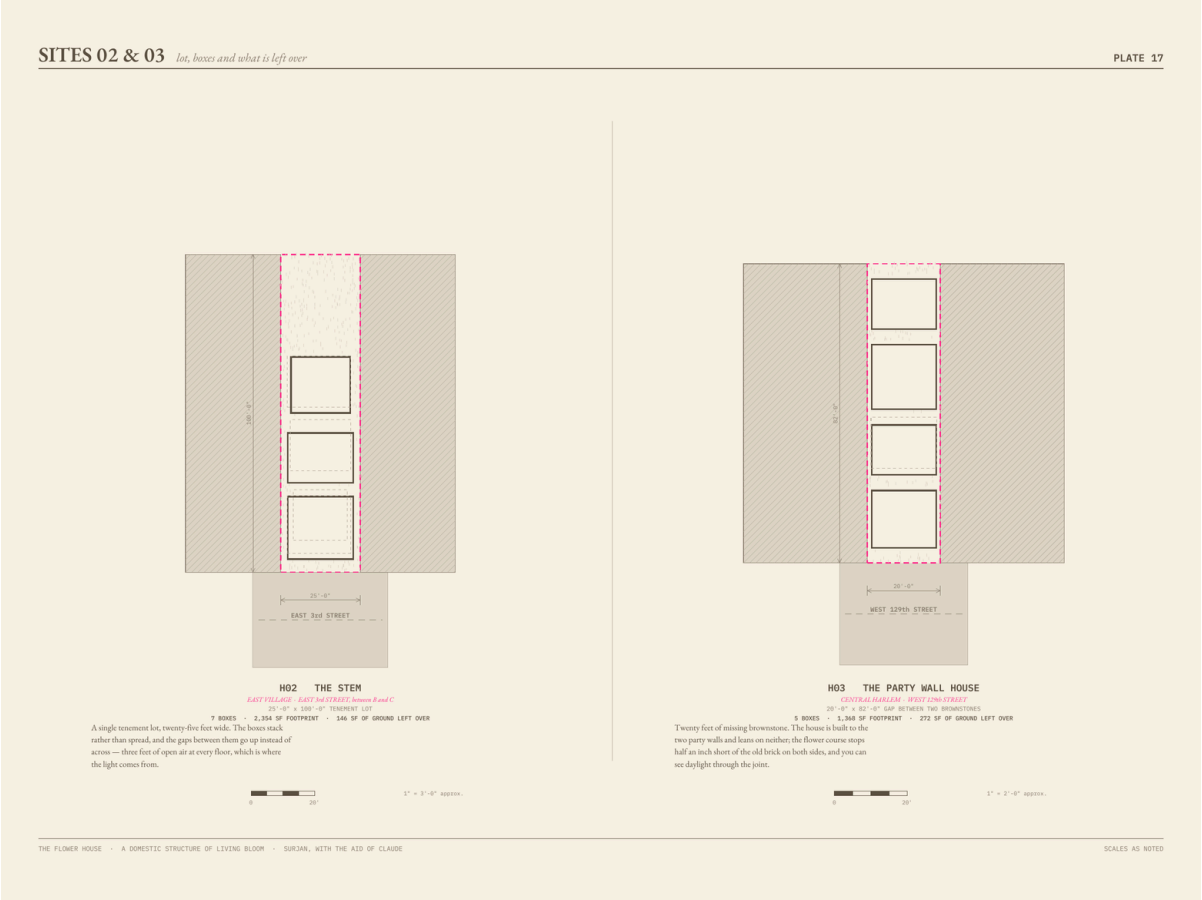

AXONOMETRIC · SITE 01
Broome Street, from the south-west
PLATE 22
Seventeen boxes on a hundred-foot square of the Lower East Side, drawn from the corner of Broome and Suffolk. The two inherited party walls stand behind, and the flower course is held half an inch clear of both for their full height.
SITE 01
FLOWER PLANE, 3 1/2" THICK
OPENING — TWELVE TYPES
INHERITED PARTY WALL, CUT AT +16'-0"
LOT LINE
17 BOXES · 24.9% COVERAGE
SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
PLANOMETRIC PROJECTION · 35°

PLATE 22 · AXONOMETRIC, SITE 01, FROM THE SOUTH-WEST. The two inherited party walls are shown cut at sixteen feet.

I have inspected this house forty-four times. I have stood in the Pavilion, alone, which is what it is for, in the second week of July with two hundred and sixty-four species standing around me on all sides at once and nothing between me and them but three-eighths of an inch of glass. I did not find it beautiful. I found it courteous. There is a difference and it took me four years to learn it.

II. East Third Street, or The Stem

A single tenement lot: twenty-five feet by a hundred, walled on both sides by buildings that were there before the flowers and will be there after. There is no room to spread, so the Stem does not spread. It stacks.


SITES 02 & 03 lot, boxes and what is left over
PLATE 17
100'-0"
25'-0"
EAST 3rd STREET
H02 THE STEM
EAST VILLAGE · EAST 3rd STREET, between B and C
25'-0" x 100'-0" TENEMENT LOT
7 BOXES · 2,354 SF FOOTPRINT · 146 SF OF GROUND LEFT OVER
A single tenement lot, twenty-five feet wide. The boxes stack rather than spread, and the gaps between them go up instead of across — three feet of open air at every floor, which is where the light comes from.
0
20'
1" = 3'-0" approx.
82'-0"
20'-0"
WEST 129th STREET
H03 THE PARTY WALL HOUSE
CENTRAL HARLEM · WEST 129th STREET
20'-0" x 82'-0" GAP BETWEEN TWO BROWNSTONES
5 BOXES · 1,360 SF FOOTPRINT · 272 SF OF GROUND LEFT OVER
Twenty feet of missing brownstone. The house is built to the two party walls and leans on neither; the flower course stops half an inch short of the old brick on both sides, and you can see daylight through the joint.
0
20'
1" = 2'-0" approx.
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SCALES AS NOTED

PLATE 17 · SITES 02 & 03. Two narrow lots between neighbours: the Stem, and the Party Wall House.

Seven boxes in four tiers, each set back or forward of the one below by a foot or two, so that the gaps between them run vertically instead of horizontally. Three feet of open air at every level. This is the whole invention of the house and it is a good one: where the Field of Boxes gets its light from the ground it has given away, the Stem gets its light from the air it has left between its own floors. Rain falls through the middle of the building and lands in a bed of iris on the lot line.

The Stem is the youngest voice on the post and the most talkative. It speaks to the Field of Boxes by bee, nine tenths of a mile, in about eleven minutes in July; to the Alley by root, two miles,

in twenty-one days; to the Pier by bee; and to the Party Wall House by bedrock, which takes six weeks and which it uses anyway.

In the seventh year a child moved into the second tier, aged six. In the January following, the Stem sent this to Broome Street by root, arriving on the twenty-first day:

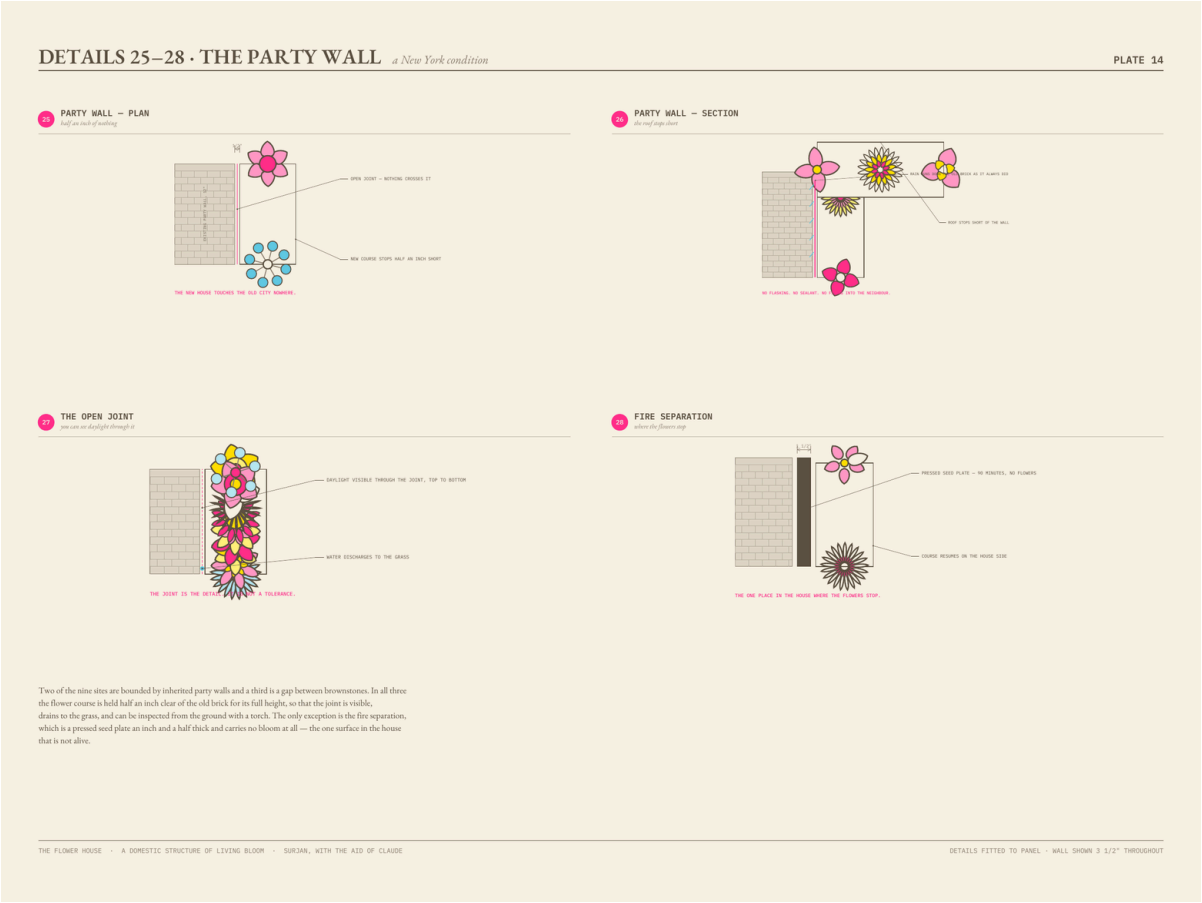
The child on the second floor has learned my species.

I have read a great deal into that sentence and I have no business doing so. The Register requires that I record what came through the channel and its elapsed time and nothing else. But I will note here, once, out of order and without authority, that a building which is made entirely of things that die every year had lived for four years next to a child who did not know the names of any of them, and that in the fifth year the child did, and that the building told somebody.

III. West 129th Street, or The Party Wall House

Twenty feet of missing brownstone. The house on one side and the house on the other are of 1889 and were, until a fire in the sixties, joined by a third which is now a gap.

Five boxes, eighteen feet wide, in single file down an eighty-two foot lot, with a sixth carried above the second at ten feet. It is the plainest of the nine and my own favourite, and I know that is a sentimental judgement and I am making it anyway.


DETAILS 25–28 · THE PARTY WALL a New York condition
PLATE 14
25 PARTY WALL — PLAN
half an inch of nothing
OPEN JOINT — NOTHING CROSSES IT
NEW COURSE STOPS HALF AN INCH SHORT
THE NEW HOUSE TOUCHES THE OLD CITY SOMEWHERE.
26 PARTY WALL — SECTION
the roof stops short
ROOF STOPS SHORT OF THE WALL
NO FLASHING. NO SEALANT.
27 THE OPEN JOINT
you can see daylight through it
DAYLIGHT VISIBLE THROUGH THE JOINT, TOP TO BOTTOM
WATER DISCHARGES TO THE GRASS
28 FIRE SEPARATION
where the flowers stop
PRESSED SEED PLATE — 90 MINUTES, NO FLOWERS
COURSE RESUMES ON THE HOUSE SIDE
THE ONE PLACE IN THE HOUSE WHERE THE FLOWERS STOP.
Two of the nine sites are bounded by inherited party walls and a third is a gap between brownstones. In all three the flower course is held half an inch clear of the old brick for its full height, so that the joint is visible, drains to the grass, and can be inspected from the ground with a torch. The only exception is the fire separation, which is a pressed seed plate an inch and a half thick and carries no bloom at all — the one surface in the house that is not alive.
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DETAILS FITTED TO PANEL · WALL SHOWN 3 1/2" THROUGHOUT

PLATE 14 · DETAILS 25–28 · THE PARTY WALL, A NEW YORK CONDITION.

The detail that governs this house is not a room or a window. It is a joint. The flower course stops half an inch short of the old brick on both sides, for the full height, and nothing crosses that half inch: no flashing, no sealant, no fixing into the neighbour. You can stand in the yard at the back with a torch and see daylight through it from the ground to the parapet. Rain runs down the 1889 brick exactly as it has run down it for a hundred and thirty-six years and goes into the grass.

There is one exception, and it is the only surface in any of the nine houses that is not alive. Where the fire regulation requires separation, there is a pressed seed plate an inch and a half thick, ninety minutes rated, carrying no bloom at all. It is the colour of a paper bag. It is eleven feet high and eighteen wide and I have watched more than one visitor put a hand flat on it, which nobody does to the flowers.

The Party Wall House speaks to the Cut in Inwood by bedrock — four and a half miles of schist, six weeks a message, November to March only. This is the longest and slowest channel on the post. On the third of January in the year I have transcribed, the Cut sent: it is colder here than it is

there. On the twenty-second the Party Wall House sent no reply, which the Register records. On the twenty-eighth of February the Cut sent again: it is still colder here than it is there.

I have thought about that exchange for three years. I do not think it is a complaint. I think it is a man on a mountain saying the same thing every winter to a man in a valley because the saying of it is the point, and the valley knows this, and does not answer, and would notice at once if it stopped.

IV. West Thirty-Seventh Street, or The Roof Field

Fourteen boxes on a loft roof a hundred and thirty-eight feet in the air, set back from every parapet so that from the street there is nothing whatever to see.

SITES 04 & 05 lot, boxes and what is left over
PLATE 18
WEST 37TH STREET
H04 THE ROOF FIELD
GARMENT DISTRICT · WEST 37TH STREET, twelve floors up
98'-0" x 138'-0" LOFT ROOF, +138'-0"
14 BOXES · 2,850 SF FOOTPRINT · 14,150 SF OF GROUND LEFT OVER
Fourteen boxes on a loft roof, set back from every parapet so that from the street there is nothing to see. The house is invisible from below and enormous from the building opposite.
1" = 4'-0" approx.
WEST STREET
60'-0"
H05 THE PIER
WEST VILLAGE · PIER 49/STUK, HUDSON RIVER
60'-0" x 210'-0" TIMBER PIER DECK
8 BOXES · 2,244 SF FOOTPRINT · 10,356 SF OF GROUND LEFT OVER
A house that walks out into the river. The gaps between the boxes are the only places in Manhattan where you can stand on nothing and look straight down at the Hudson through the deck.
1" = 5'-0" approx.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SCALES AS NOTED

PLATE 18 · SITES 04 & 05. The Roof Field, and the Pier.

This is the invisible house. From the pavement of West Thirty-Seventh Street you may stand directly beneath it and see sky. From the eleventh floor of the building opposite you see a village:

fourteen white volumes between seven and thirteen feet high, scattered across ninety feet by a hundred and eighty of tar and gravel that has been given over to grass, with a hundred and forty thousand flowers on it in the second week of June.

Because it is highest it is warmest, and because it is warmest it is first. Every year the Roof Field flowers before any of the others, in the last week of February, and every year it tells them, by wind, in under four minutes: up here it is already happening. This is the earliest message in the calendar and the Register has recorded it eleven times in eleven years with a variance of nine days.

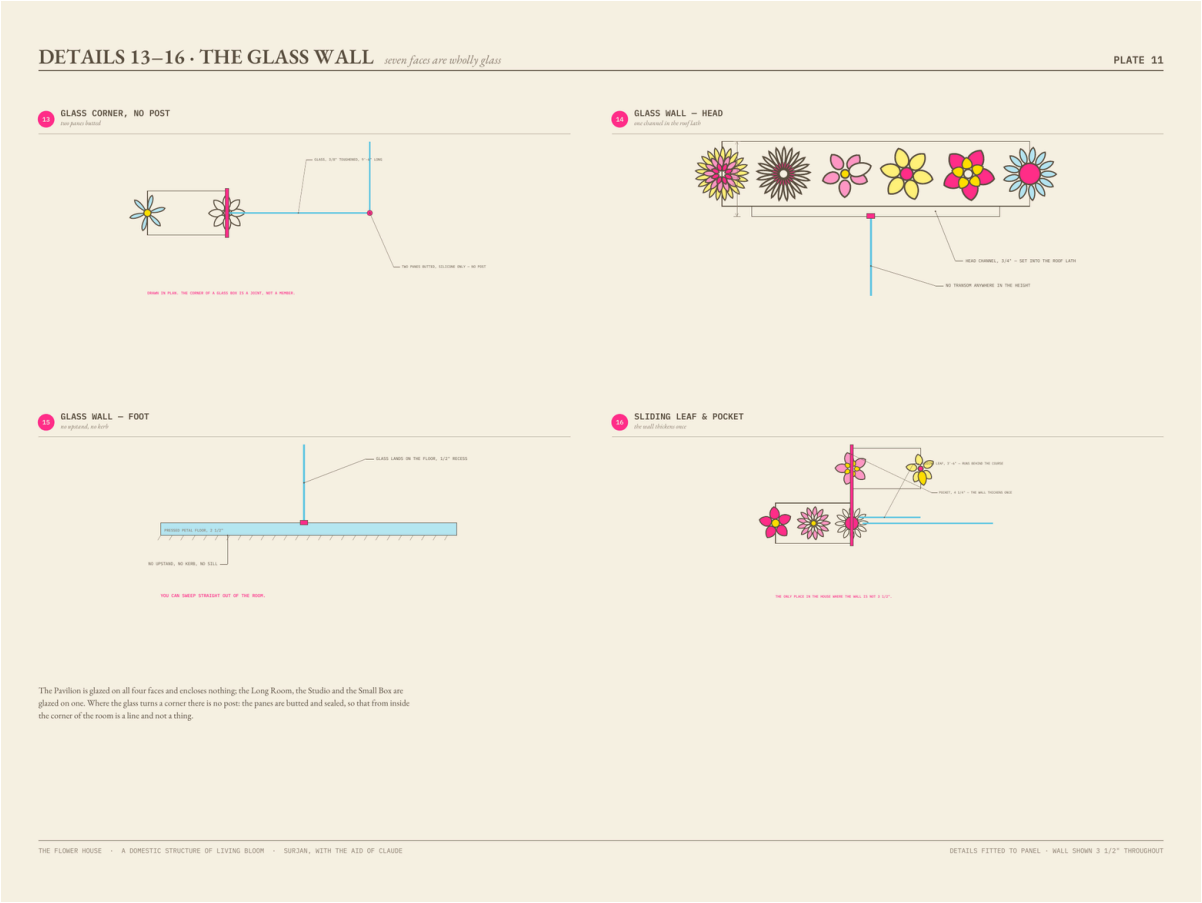
The Day of Looking Up is kept on the first of June. It is not a real holiday and no authority has ever recognised it. What happens is that from about eleven in the morning the pavements of Thirty-Sixth through Thirty-Eighth Street fill with people standing on the wrong side of the road with their heads back, and other people who have not heard of it walk into them, and are told, and stay.

Nobody sees anything. That is the joke and everybody is in on it. You stand on the wrong pavement, you tip your head back, you see the underside of a cornice and a strip of sky, and somebody who has done it before says: it's up there. And you say: I know. And you both keep looking.

V. The Hudson, or The Pier

Eight boxes on the deck of a pier stub off the West Village: sixty feet wide, two hundred and ten long, running out into the river on timber that was condemned in 1979 and has been holding up a house made of flowers since the fifth year.

The gaps between the boxes on this house are the only places in Manhattan where you can stand on nothing at all and look straight down at the Hudson through the deck. There are seven such gaps. The narrowest is three feet, the widest is twenty-six, and the widest is where the children go.


DETAILS 13–16 · THE GLASS WALL seven faces are wholly glass
PLATE 11
13 GLASS CORNER, NO POST
two panes butted
14 GLASS WALL — HEAD
one channel in the roof lath
15 GLASS WALL — FOOT
no upstand, no kerb
16 SLIDING LEAF & POCKET
the wall thickens once
The Pavilion is glazed on all four faces and encloses nothing: the Long Room, the Studio and the Small Box are glazed on one. Where the glass turns a corner there is no post: the panes are butted and sealed, so that from inside the corner of the room is a line and not a thing.
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DETAILS FITTED TO PANEL · WALL SHOWN 3 1/2" THROUGHOUT

PLATE 11 · DETAILS 13–16 · THE GLASS WALL. Where the glass turns a corner there is no post.

The Pier is the slowest of the nine to open and one of the last to close, because the river holds its heat into November and takes it back in April. Its feast is the Walking Out, on the thirtieth of July, and it is the only one of the nine feasts that has ever had to be limited, because in the sixth year eleven hundred people went out onto a pier rated for four hundred and the Department closed it for a season and I was the one who signed the notice.

It speaks to the Traffic Island at a hundred and six streets away by river, which is not a metaphor: the message goes north on the flood tide and takes about two hours, and I have never understood the mechanism and the Register does not require me to.

In January, when nothing else is running, the Pier sends one message and sends it to nobody in particular. It has sent the same one for eleven years.

The river is moving under me and I am not.

It is the only line in the entire Register that I have ever heard a person quote from memory in the street.

VI. Broadway at Seventy-First, or The Triangle

Where Broadway cuts the grid it leaves a wedge behind, and this house is built in one of them: ninety-eight feet on the street, a hundred and twenty-four up the side, and nothing at the far end but a point.

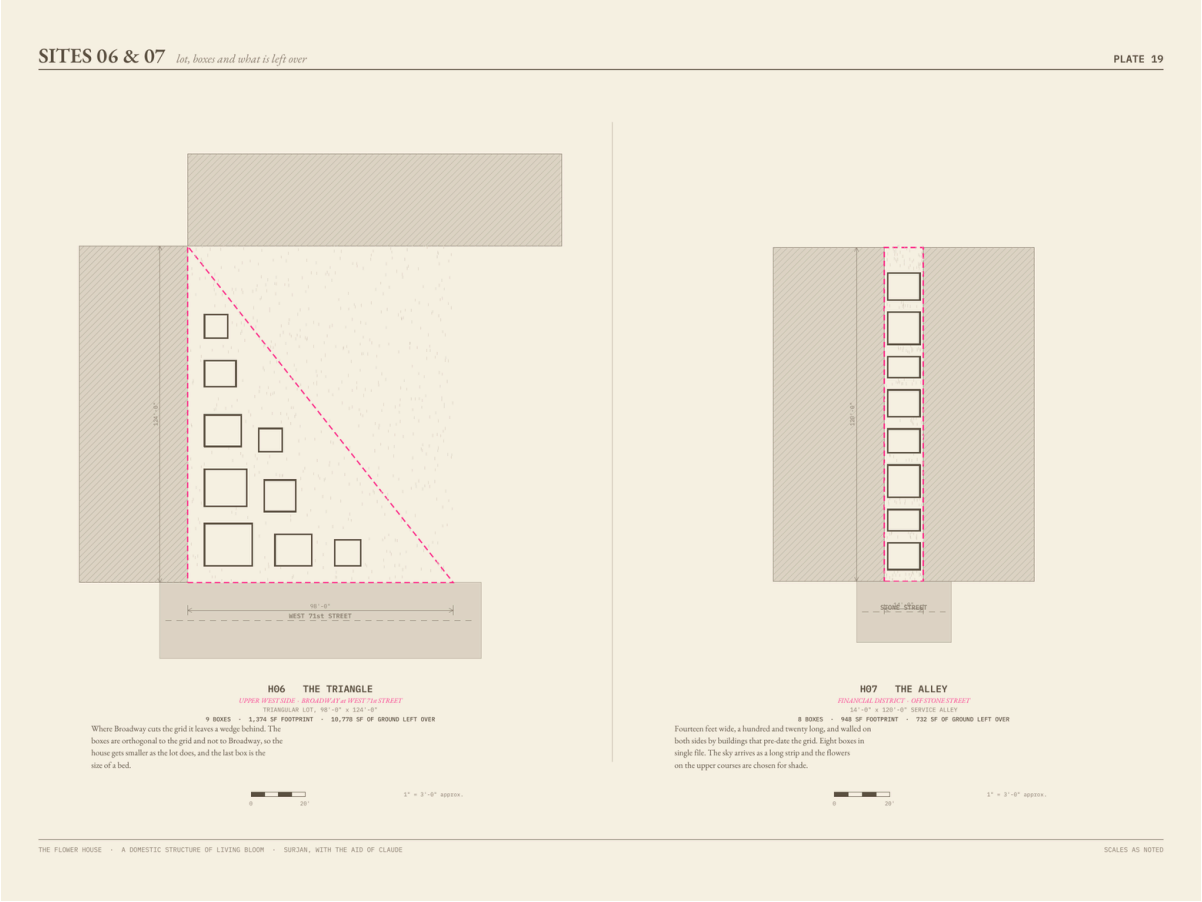

SITES 06 & 07 lot, boxes and what is left over
PLATE 19
98'-0"
WEST 71st STREET
H06 THE TRIANGLE
UPPER WEST SIDE · BROADWAY at WEST 71st STREET
TRIANGULAR LOT, 98'-0" x 124'-0"
9 BOXES · 1,374 SF FOOTPRINT · 10,778 SF OF GROUND LEFT OVER
Where Broadway cuts the grid it leaves a wedge behind. The boxes are orthogonal to the grid and not to Broadway, so the house gets smaller as the lot does, and the last box is the size of a bed.
1" = 3'-0" approx.
0
20'
STONE STREET
H07 THE ALLEY
FINANCIAL DISTRICT · OFF STONE STREET
14'-0" x 120'-0" SERVICE ALLEY
8 BOXES · 948 SF FOOTPRINT · 732 SF OF GROUND LEFT OVER
Fourteen feet wide, a hundred and twenty long, and walled on both sides by buildings that pre-date the grid. Eight boxes in single file. The sky arrives as a long strip and the flowers on the upper courses are chosen for shade.
1" = 3'-0" approx.
0
20'
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SCALES AS NOTED

PLATE 19 · SITES 06 & 07. The Triangle, and the Alley.

Nine boxes, all of them orthogonal to the grid and none of them to Broadway, so that as the lot narrows the house does too, and the last box is nine feet square and is the size of a bed, and is a bed. Standing in the point of that lot at eight in the morning with traffic on two sides is the single most

unlikely domestic experience the city offers, and I have recommended it to people at parties and been looked at oddly.

The Triangle is the argumentative one. It speaks to the Traffic Island by the draught of the subway — ninety seconds, all year, the fastest channel on the post — and the two of them keep up an exchange in winter which the Register can only describe as bickering. On the eleventh of January in the transcribed year the Traffic Island sent one word, salt, and the Triangle answered within ninety seconds: salt here too, it will be June before we know. Both of them stand in the spray of a plough route. Both of them lose species to it every year. Neither of them will consent to be the one who says it first.

It also speaks to the Roof Field by wind and to the Party Wall House by pigeon, which last is the mode I like best and the one I have the least evidence for. Columba livia, unpaid. Twenty minutes. Three miles. The Register lists it as attested and the attestation is a photograph.

VII. Off Stone Street, or The Alley

Fourteen feet wide, a hundred and twenty long, walled on both sides by buildings that pre-date the grid. Eight boxes in single file, twelve feet wide, with slots of sky between them of two, four, three, two, four, three and two feet.

The sky arrives here as a long grey strip about eleven degrees across. The species on the upper courses are chosen for shade and are the only part of the schedule that is not shared with the other eight houses. This is the smallest of the nine, the darkest, the coldest, the last to open, the first to go, and the one this city loves most, and I have stopped trying to explain that and have started simply recording it.

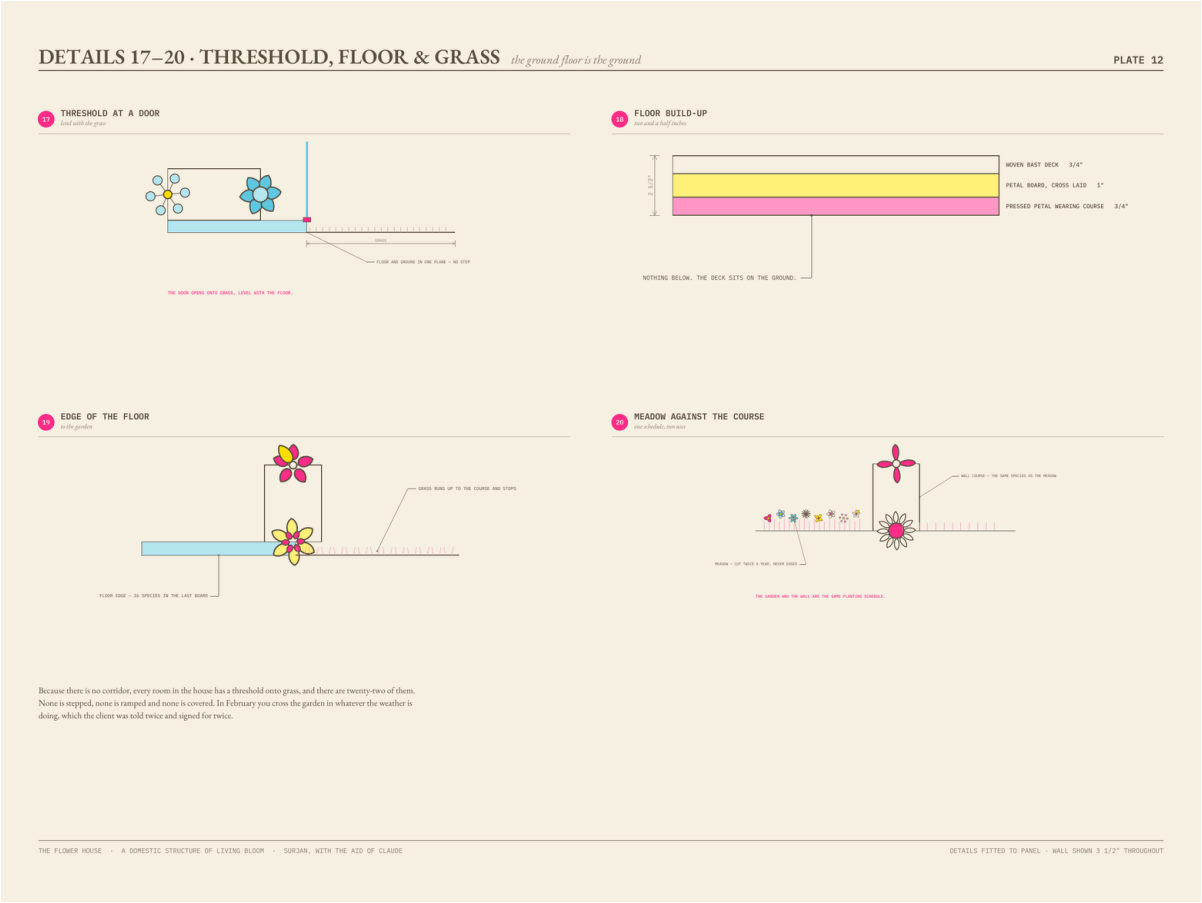

DETAILS 17–20 · THRESHOLD, FLOOR & GRASS the ground floor is the ground
PLATE 12
17 THRESHOLD AT A DOOR
level with the grass
FLOOR AND GROUND IN ONE PLANE — NO STEP
THE DOOR OPENS ONTO GRASS, LEVEL WITH THE FLOOR.
18 FLOOR BUILD-UP
two and a half inches
WOVEN BAST DECK 3/4"
PETAL BOARD, CROSS LAID 1"
PRESSED PETAL WEARING COURSE 3/4"
2 1/2"
NOTHING BELOW. THE DECK SITS ON THE GROUND.
19 EDGE OF THE FLOOR
to the garden
GRASS RUNS UP TO THE COURSE AND STOPS
FLOOR EDGE — 26 SPECIES IN THE LAST BOARD
20 MEADOW AGAINST THE COURSE
one schedule, two ways
WALL COURSE — THE SAME SPECIES AS THE MEADOW
MEADOW — CUT TWICE A YEAR, NEVER ONCE
THE GARDEN AND THE WALL ARE THE SAME PLANTING SCHEDULE.
Because there is no corridor, every room in the house has a threshold onto grass, and there are twenty-two of them. None is stepped, none is ramped and none is covered. In February you cross the garden in whatever the weather is doing, which the client was told twice and signed for twice.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DETAILS FITTED TO PANEL · WALL SHOWN 3 1/2" THROUGHOUT

PLATE 12 · DETAILS 17–20 · THRESHOLD, FLOOR & GRASS. Twenty-two thresholds, none stepped, none covered.

The Night of the Narrow is the ninth of August. Fourteen people are admitted at a time and are given four minutes. There is a waiting list. It is eleven years long. It is kept in a school exercise book by a man named Hector Salgado who owns nothing and is paid nothing and has never missed a year, and who will tell you, if you ask, that he inherited the book from a woman named Adela Quinn.

On the post the Alley appears in four channels and has never once been observed to originate one. It hears everything first, being nearest to the harbour and to the root network under the oldest streets in the city, and it repeats none of it. In the transcribed January there is an entry for the seventh of February which reads, in full: silence, as recorded, and counted.

I want to be careful here, because it is the place where a clerk becomes a poet and does damage. The Register counts silence because the form has a field for it and the field must be filled. That is all. But eleven years of a form has taught me that a house which receives on four channels and transmits on none is not broken and is not shy. It is listening. There is a difference between a thing that has

nothing to say and a thing that has decided that what it has to say is less useful than what it is hearing, and the second thing is rare in buildings and rarer in people.

VIII. Inwood, or The Cut

Eleven boxes on four terraces of Manhattan schist, a hundred and twenty feet by ninety, off Dyckman Street. Nothing was levelled. The rock does the work that a ground floor usually does, and the house climbs it in twenty-foot steps, so that the roof of the third box is the doorstep of the seventh.

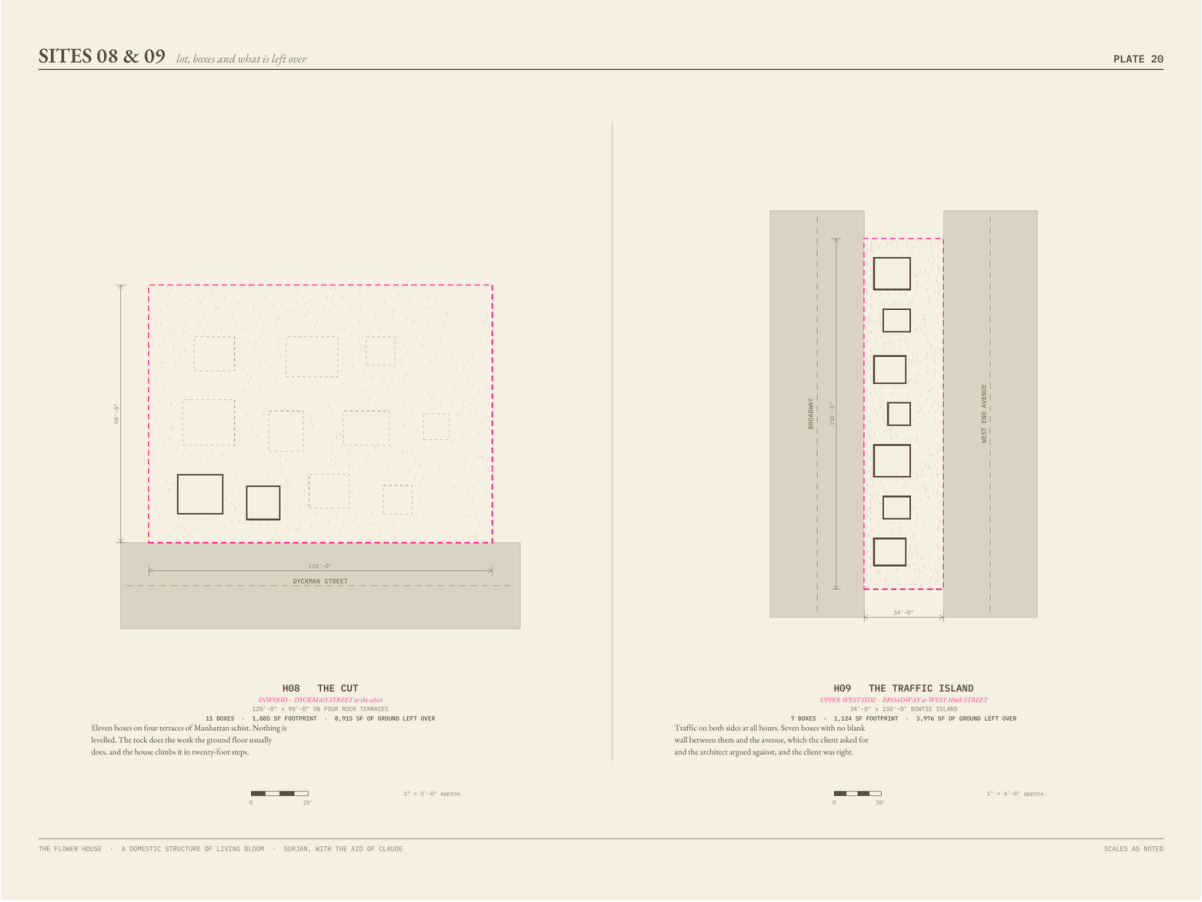

SITES 08 & 09 lot, boxes and what is left over
PLATE 20
90'-0"
120'-0"
DYCKMAN STREET
H08 THE CUT
INWOOD · DYCKMAN STREET at the whar
120'-0" x 90'-0" ON FOUR ROCK TERRACES
11 BOXES · 1,085 SF FOOTPRINT · 8,915 SF OF GROUND LEFT OVER
Eleven boxes on four terraces of Manhattan schist. Nothing is levelled. The rock does the work the ground floor usually does, and the house climbs it in twenty-foot steps.
1" = 3'-0" approx.
BROADWAY
150'-0"
WEST END AVENUE
34'-0"
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
UPPER WEST SIDE · BROADWAY at WEST 104th STREET
34'-0" x 150'-0" BOWTIE ISLAND
7 BOXES · 1,124 SF FOOTPRINT · 3,976 SF OF GROUND LEFT OVER
Traffic on both sides at all hours. Seven boxes with no blank wall between them and the avenue, which the client asked for and the architect argued against, and the client was right.
1" = 4'-0" approx.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SCALES AS NOTED

PLATE 20 · SITES 08 & 09. The Cut, and the Traffic Island.

This is the northernmost of the nine and the last to receive everything. The bee routes do not reach it. The wind routes arrive but arrive tired. What it has is the rock, and the rock is slow and

enormous and works all winter when nothing else does, and by the rock it speaks to the Party Wall House four and a half miles south at six weeks a message.

I said in an earlier chapter what those two say to each other. I will add here only that the Cut originates constantly and is answered late or not at all, and that the Register has recorded this without comment for eleven years, and that this chapter is the comment.

The Feast of the Rock is on the fifteenth of July and is the only one of the nine at which people bring food. I do not know why. Nobody knows why. It began, as far as the exercise book can establish, in the third year with two families and a folding table, and it is now nine hundred people on a hillside eating out of foil, looking at eleven small white boxes standing on stone that is four hundred and fifty million years old and is not going anywhere, wearing a hundred thousand flowers that will be gone by October.

IX. One Hundred and Sixth Street, or The Traffic Island

A bowtie of ground thirty-four feet by a hundred and fifty, with Broadway on one side and West End Avenue on the other and traffic on both at all hours.

Seven boxes, and — this is the whole of the argument of the ninth house — no blank wall between any of them and the avenue. The client asked for it. The architect argued against it, in writing, twice. The client was right.

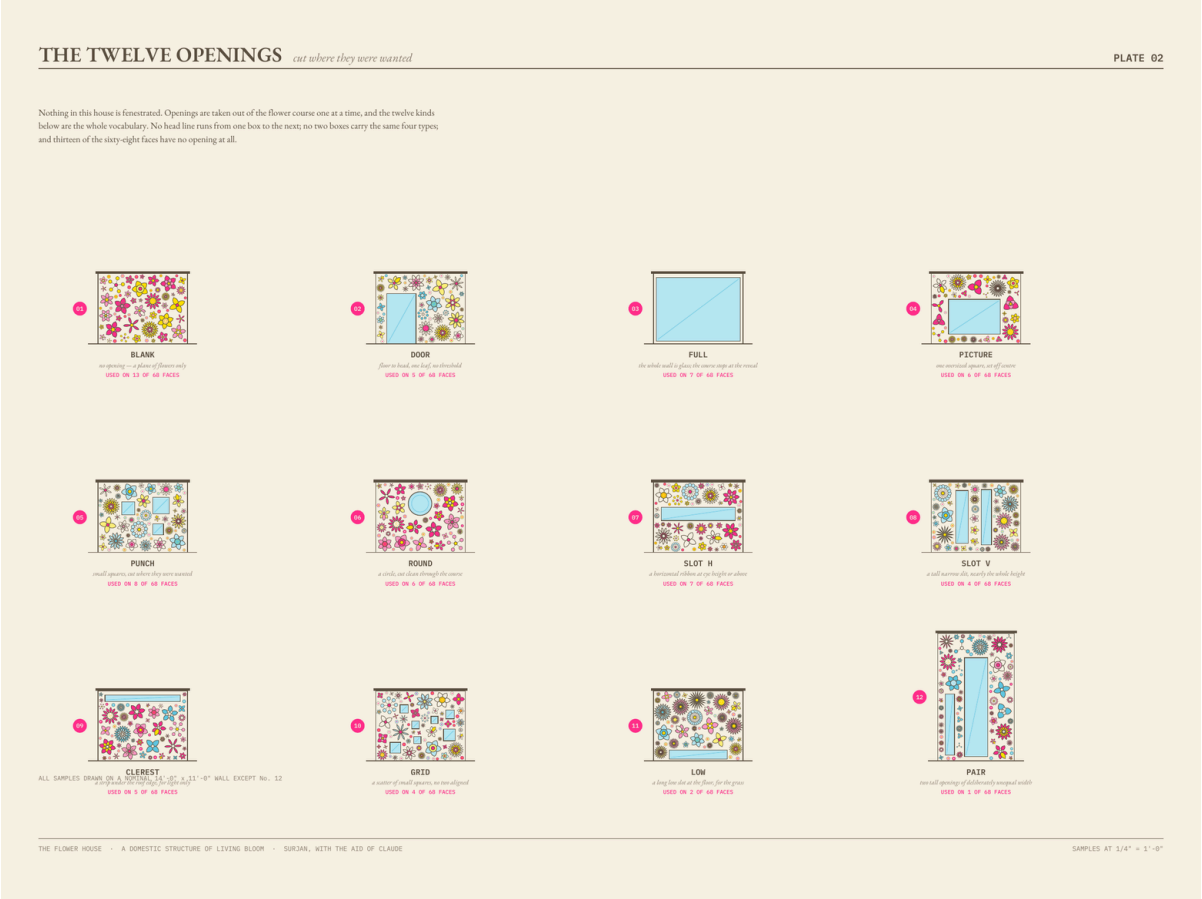

THE TWELVE OPENINGS cut where they were wanted
PLATE 02
Nothing in this house is fenestrated. Openings are taken out of the flower course one at a time, and the twelve kinds below are the whole vocabulary. No head line runs from one box to the next; no two boxes carry the same four types; and thirteen of the sixty-eight faces have no opening at all.
01
BLANK
no opening — a piece of flowers only
USED ON 13 OF 68 FACES
02
DOOR
floor to head, one leaf, no threshold
USED ON 5 OF 68 FACES
03
FULL
the whole wall is glass; its course stops at the reveal
USED ON 7 OF 68 FACES
04
PICTURE
one oversized square, set off centre
USED ON 6 OF 68 FACES
05
PUNCH
small squares, cut where they were wanted
USED ON 8 OF 68 FACES
06
ROUND
a circle, cut clean through the course
USED ON 6 OF 68 FACES
07
SLOT H
a horizontal ribbon at eye height or above
USED ON 7 OF 68 FACES
08
SLOT V
a tall narrow slit, nearly the whole height
USED ON 4 OF 68 FACES
09
CLEREST
a band under the roof slope, for light only
USED ON 5 OF 68 FACES
10
GRID
a scatter of small squares, no two aligned
USED ON 4 OF 68 FACES
11
LOW
a long low slot at the floor, for the grass
USED ON 2 OF 68 FACES
12
PAIR
two tall openings of deliberately unequal width
USED ON 1 OF 68 FACES
ALL SAMPLES DRAWN ON A NOMINAL 14'-0" x 11'-0" WALL EXCEPT No. 12
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SAMPLES AT 1/4" = 1'-0"

PLATE 02 · THE TWELVE OPENINGS. Thirteen of the sixty-eight faces of the first house are blank. Here, none.

There are twelve kinds of opening in this vocabulary and the Traffic Island uses eleven of them, refusing only BLANK. Full glass on the Broadway side. A round window facing the crosstown bus. A grid of small squares, no two aligned, on the north face of the third box, where children on the M104 have counted them and disagreed for years about whether there are seven or eight.

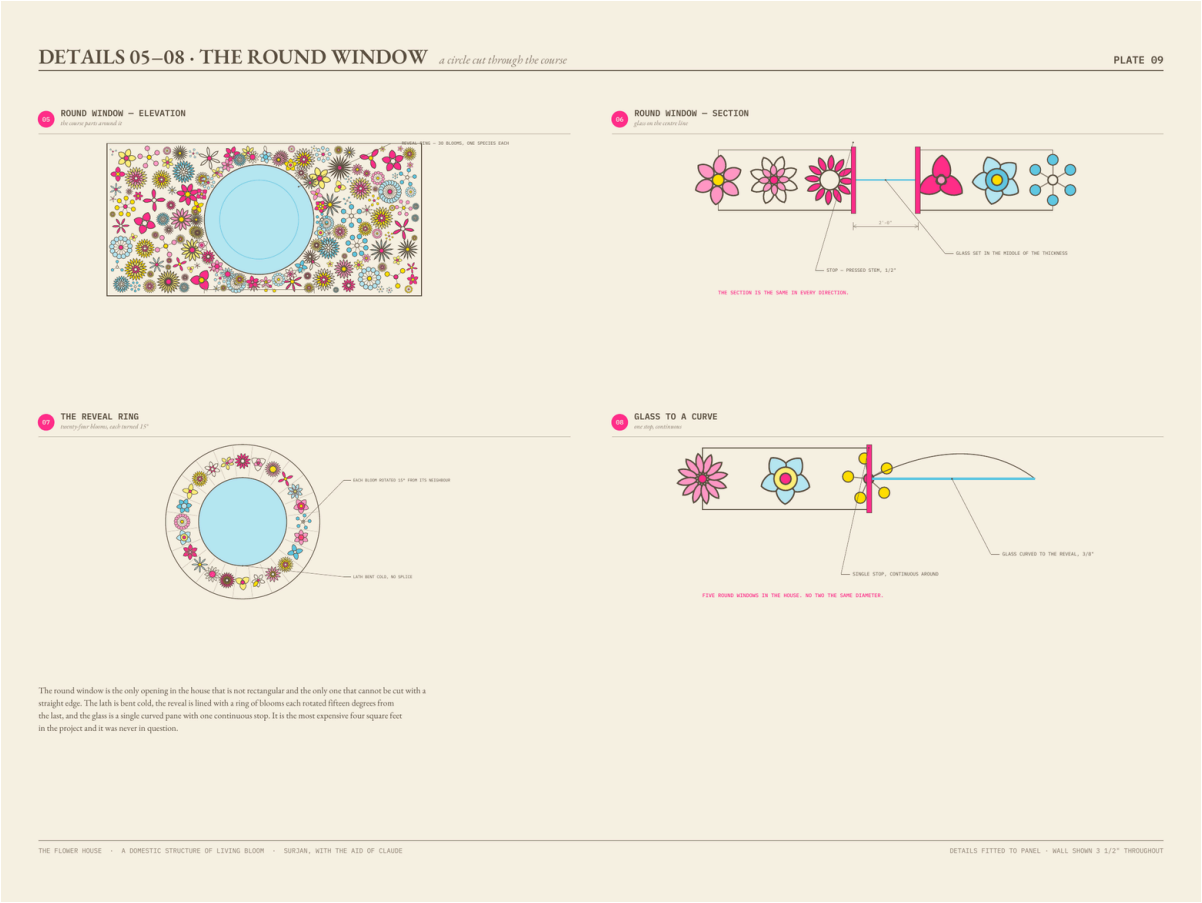

DETAILS 05–08 · THE ROUND WINDOW
a circle cut through the course
PLATE 09
05 ROUND WINDOW — ELEVATION
the course parts around it
REVEAL RING — 30 BLOOMS, ONE SPECIES EACH
06 ROUND WINDOW — SECTION
glass on the centre line
3/4"
GLASS SET IN THE MIDDLE OF THE THICKNESS
STOP — PRESSED STEM, 1/2"
THE SECTION IS THE SAME IN EVERY DIRECTION.
07 THE REVEAL RING
twenty-four blooms, each turned 15°
EACH BLOOM ROTATED 15° FROM ITS NEIGHBOUR
LATH BENT COLD, NO SPLICE
08 GLASS TO A CURVE
one stop, continuous
GLASS CURVED TO THE REVEAL, 3/8"
SINGLE STOP, CONTINUOUS AROUND
FIVE ROUND WINDOWS IN THE HOUSE. NO TWO THE SAME DIAMETER.
The round window is the only opening in the house that is not rectangular and the only one that cannot be cut with a straight edge. The lath is bent cold, the reveal is lined with a ring of blooms each rotated fifteen degrees from the last, and the glass is a single curved pane with one continuous stop. It is the most expensive four square feet in the project and it was never in question.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DETAILS FITTED TO PANEL · WALL SHOWN 3 1/2" THROUGHOUT

PLATE 09 · DETAILS 05–08 · THE ROUND WINDOW. Twenty-four blooms in the reveal, each turned fifteen degrees.

It is warmed on two sides by ten thousand engines a day, and so it is the first of the nine to flower — the twenty-sixth of May, most years — and the first to fall, in the second week of December, when the plough salt reaches it. Its feast, the Opening of the Road, is the earliest in the calendar and the shortest: forty minutes, at seven in the morning, before the traffic thickens. About six hundred people stand on two traffic islands and a median and applaud a building, and then the light changes and everyone goes to work.

On the twentieth of February, by subway draught, in ninety seconds, to all eight of the others, the Traffic Island sends the same message every year:

I have started. Do not wait for me.

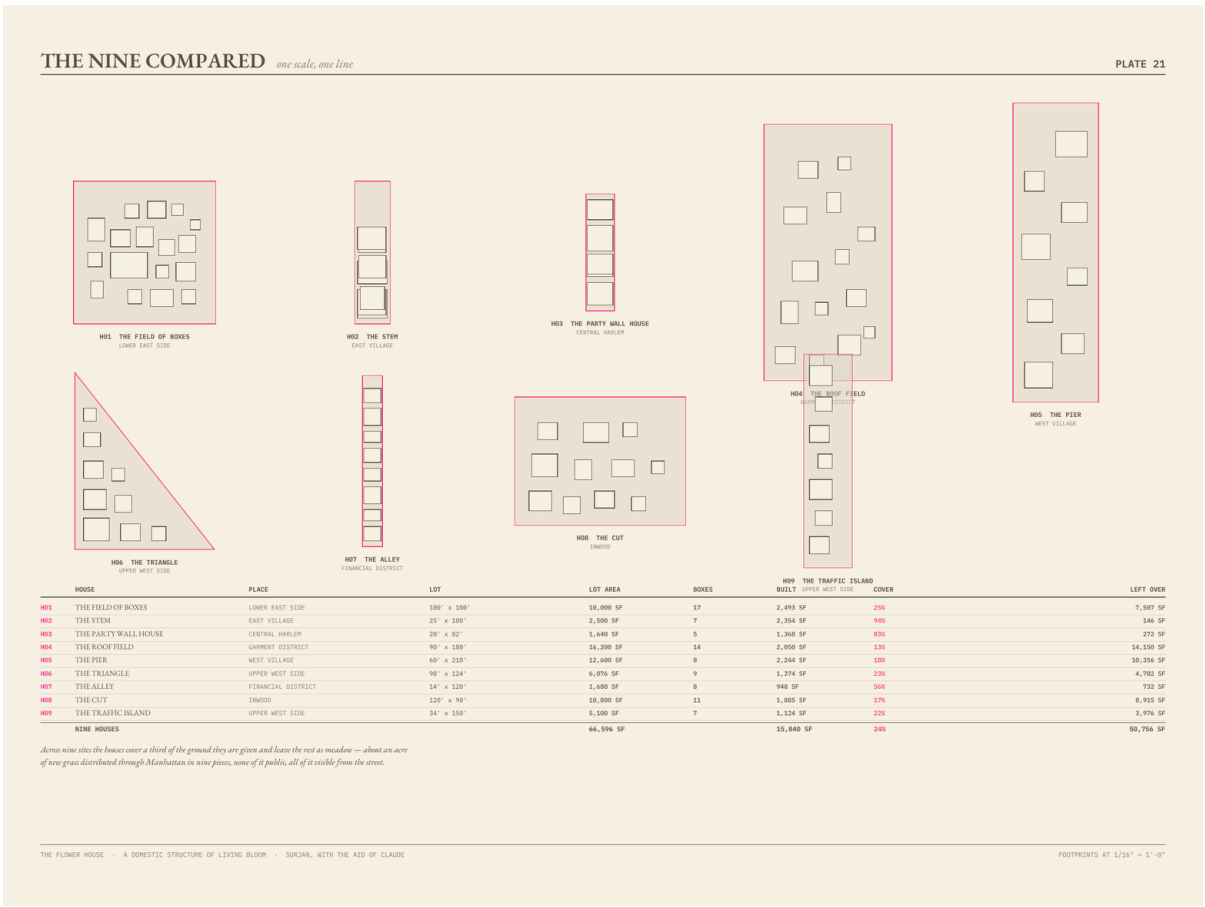

THE NINE COMPARED
one scale, one line
PLATE 21
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES
LOWER EAST SIDE
H02 THE STEM
EAST VILLAGE
H03 THE PARTY WALL HOUSE
CENTRAL HARLEM
H04 THE ROOF FIELD
H05 THE PIER
WEST VILLAGE
H06 THE TRIANGLE
UPPER WEST SIDE
H07 THE ALLEY
FINANCIAL DISTRICT
H08 THE CUT
INWOOD
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
UPPER WEST SIDE
HOUSE PLACE LOT LOT AREA BOXES BUILT COVER LEFT OVER
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES LOWER EAST SIDE 100' x 100' 10,000 SF 17 2,493 SF 25% 7,507 SF
H02 THE STEM EAST VILLAGE 25' x 100' 2,500 SF 7 2,354 SF 94% 146 SF
H03 THE PARTY WALL HOUSE CENTRAL HARLEM 20' x 82' 1,640 SF 5 1,368 SF 83% 272 SF
H04 THE ROOF FIELD GARMENT DISTRICT 90' x 180' 16,200 SF 14 2,050 SF 13% 14,150 SF
H05 THE PIER WEST VILLAGE 60' x 210' 12,600 SF 8 2,244 SF 18% 10,356 SF
H06 THE TRIANGLE UPPER WEST SIDE 98' x 124' 6,076 SF 9 1,374 SF 23% 4,702 SF
H07 THE ALLEY FINANCIAL DISTRICT 14' x 120' 1,680 SF 8 948 SF 56% 732 SF
H08 THE CUT INWOOD 120' x 90' 10,800 SF 11 1,885 SF 17% 8,915 SF
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND UPPER WEST SIDE 34' x 150' 5,100 SF 7 1,124 SF 22% 3,976 SF
NINE HOUSES 66,596 SF 15,840 SF 24% 50,756 SF
Across nine sites the houses cover a third of the ground they are given and leave the rest as meadow — about an acre of new grass distributed through Manhattan in nine pieces, none of it public, all of it visible from the street.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
FOOTPRINTS AT 1/16" = 1'-0"

PLATE 21 · THE NINE COMPARED. Across nine sites the houses cover a third of the ground they were given.

X. The Ten That Were Not Built

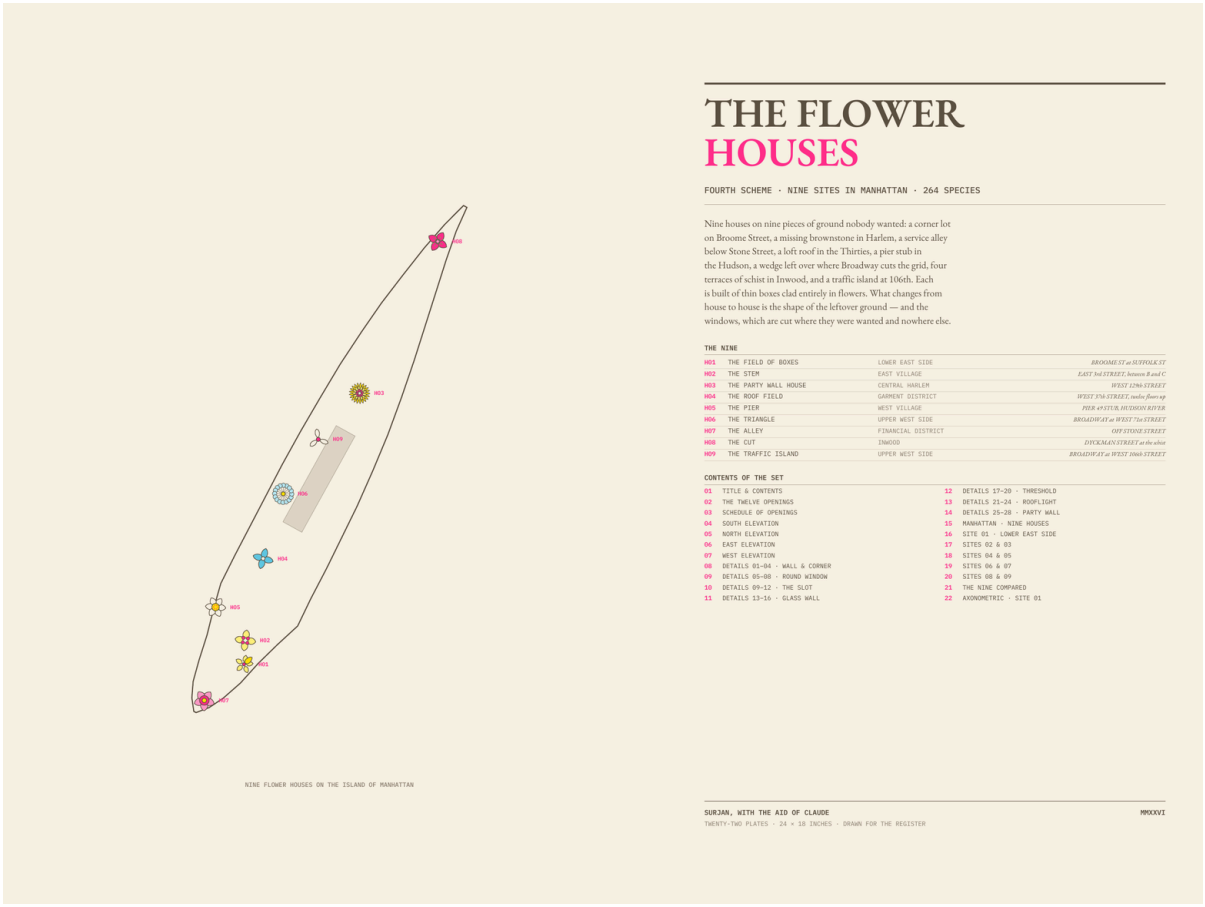

THE FLOWER
HOUSES
FOURTH SCHEME · NINE SITES IN MANHATTAN · 264 SPECIES
Nine houses on nine pieces of ground nobody wanted: a corner lot on Broome Street, a missing brownstone in Harlem, a service alley below Stone Street, a loft roof in the Thirties, a pier stub in the Hudson, a wedge left over where Broadway cuts the grid, four terraces of schist in Inwood, and a traffic island at 106th. Each is built of thin boxes clad entirely in flowers. What changes from house to house is the shape of the leftover ground — and the windows, which are cut where they were wanted and nowhere else.
THE NINE
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES LOWER EAST SIDE BROOME ST at SUFFOLK ST
H02 THE STEM EAST VILLAGE EAST 3rd STREET, between B and C
H03 THE PARTY WALL HOUSE CENTRAL HARLEM WEST 129th STREET
H04 THE ROOF FIELD GARMENT DISTRICT WEST 37th STREET, twelve floors up
H05 THE PIER WEST VILLAGE PIER 40 FOOT OF HUDSON RIVER
H06 THE TRIANGLE UPPER WEST SIDE BROADWAY at WEST 72nd STREET
H07 THE ALLEY FINANCIAL DISTRICT OFF STONE STREET
H08 THE CUT INWOOD DYCKMAN STREET at the 1 train
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND UPPER WEST SIDE BROADWAY at WEST 106th STREET
CONTENTS OF THE SET
01 TITLE & CONTENTS
02 THE TWELVE OPENINGS
03 SCHEDULE OF OPENINGS
04 SOUTH ELEVATION
05 NORTH ELEVATION
06 EAST ELEVATION
07 WEST ELEVATION
08 DETAILS 01–04 · WALL & CORNER
09 DETAILS 05–08 · ROUND WINDOW
10 DETAILS 09–12 · THE SLOT
11 DETAILS 13–16 · GLASS WALL
12 DETAILS 17–20 · THRESHOLD
13 DETAILS 21–24 · ROOFLIGHT
14 DETAILS 25–28 · PARTY WALL
15 MANHATTAN · NINE HOUSES
16 SITE 01 · LOWER EAST SIDE
17 SITES 02 & 03
18 SITES 04 & 05
19 SITES 06 & 07
20 SITES 08 & 09
21 THE NINE COMPARED
22 AXONOMETRIC · SITE 01
H01
H02
H03
H04
H05
H06
H07
H08
H09
NINE FLOWER HOUSES ON THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN
SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
MMXXVI
TWENTY-TWO PLATES · 24 × 18 INCHES · DRAWN FOR THE REGISTER

PLATE 01 · GENERAL ARRANGEMENT. Nine houses on nine pieces of ground nobody wanted; and there were nineteen.

Nine houses stand. Nineteen were sought. I set down the ten that were not built because a Register that records only what exists is a catalogue, and a catalogue is a form of advertising.

A lot on Rivington Street, ninety by sixty, refused by the owner in the third year on the grounds that it was going to be a hotel. It is a hotel.

A rail cut at Eleventh Avenue, withdrawn in the fourth year when the ground came back positive for four things.

A roof on Beaver Street, granted and then refused when the insurer discovered that the cladding was, in their own words, biological. The correspondence runs to a hundred and forty pages and includes the sentence: we would have no difficulty with ivy.

A traffic island at Ninety-Sixth Street, lost to a bus lane.

Two lots in East New York which the Department itself killed, in the sixth year, on a zoning point which I helped to draft and which I now believe to have been wrong.

A pier at Twenty-Sixth Street, lost to a rowing club, amicably.

A courtyard behind a hospital in Washington Heights, refused by the hospital's board after a presentation at which a member asked whether the patients would have to watch it die every winter, and was told yes, and said no.

I think about that one more than the other nine put together, and I have never been able to decide who was right, and I have stopped assuming it was us.

A rock terrace above the Harlem River, still live after seven years, still refused planning twice, still applied for annually by a woman who is now eighty-one.

And a hundred-foot square on Broome Street, at the corner of Suffolk, held vacant since 1974, which was refused in the first year and granted in the second, and on which everything else in this book depends. It was a near thing. The vote was four to three.

Nine houses stand because of one vote in the second year, and I was in the room, and I did not speak, because I was thirty-two and it was not my place, and it has taken eleven years and forty-three fields for me to work out what I would have said.

BOOK TWO · THE POST

In which it is set out how the nine houses came to be known to speak, by what means they do so, and what was said in one winter.

XI. How It Was Discovered That They Spoke

In the fourth year Adela Quinn was forty-eight, out of work, and living on Rivington Street in a room with a window that faced, at an angle and across two lots, the north-east corner of the Field of Boxes.

She was not a botanist. She had been a dispatcher for a car service for nineteen years, which is a job that consists entirely of noticing that two things which should be unrelated keep happening in the same order.

What she noticed was this. In the last week of May the Field of Boxes took up a species it had not carried the previous year — Lychnis chalcedonica, scarlet, ordinary, number 168 in the schedule — on the north face of the Kitchen Box. Eleven days later the Stem, nine tenths of a mile south-east, took up the same species on its second tier. Six weeks after that the Alley took it up, on the fourth box, in shade, where it did badly.

She wrote to the Department. The letter was filed. She wrote again in October with a table of nine such adoptions over two seasons, with dates, in ballpoint, on the back of a menu from a place on Essex Street that has since closed. It is the first document in this Register and it is the only one I have never allowed to be photocopied for the file, because I want the object.

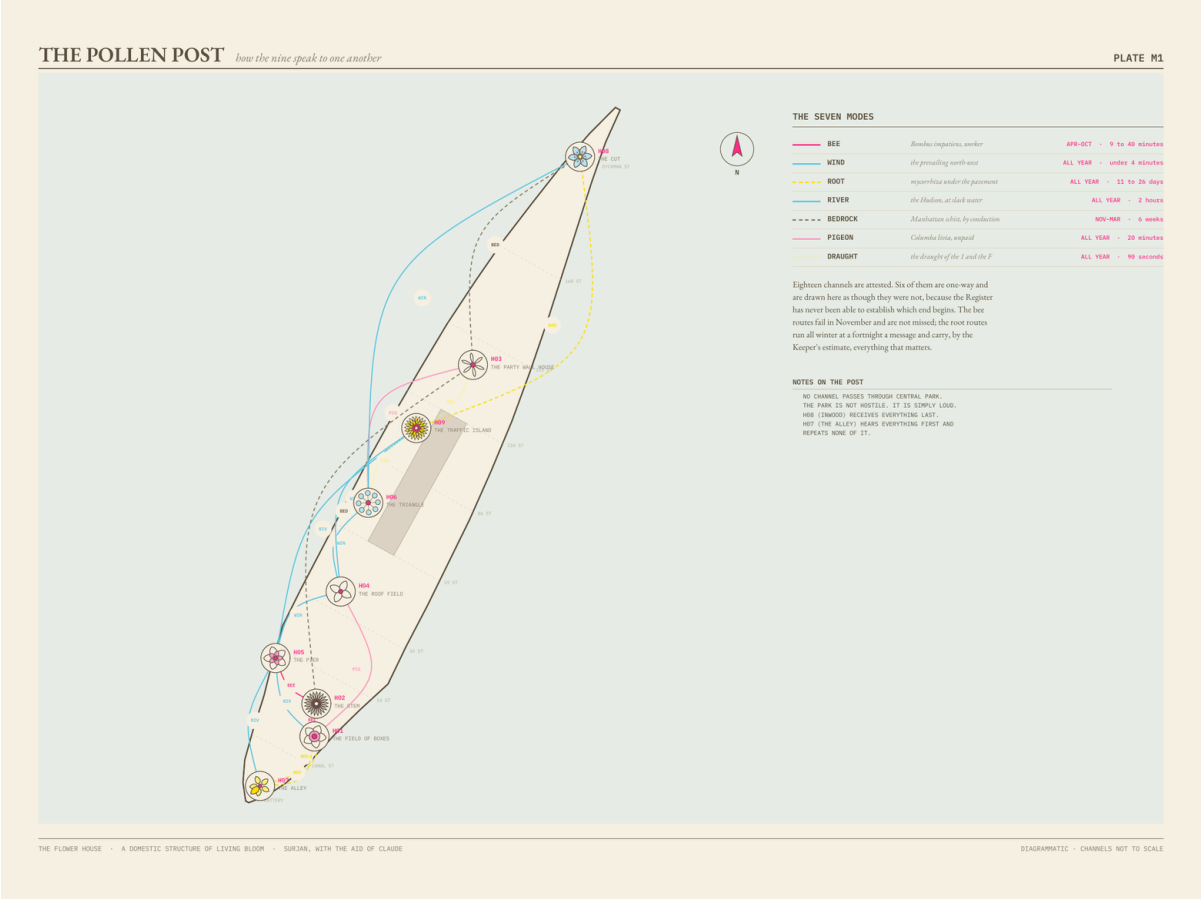

THE POLLEN POST
how the nine speak to one another
PLATE M1
THE SEVEN MODES
BEE
Bombus impatiens, worker
APR–OCT · 9 to 40 minutes
WIND
the prevailing north-west
ALL YEAR · under 4 minutes
ROOT
mycorrhiza under the pavement
ALL YEAR · 11 to 26 days
RIVER
the Hudson, at slack water
ALL YEAR · 2 hours
BEDROCK
Manhattan schist, by conduction
NOV–MAR · 6 weeks
PIGEON
Columba livia, unpaid
ALL YEAR · 20 minutes
DRAUGHT
the draught of the 1 and the F
ALL YEAR · 90 seconds
Eighteen channels are attested. Six of them are one-way and are drawn here as though they were not, because the Register has never been able to establish which end begins. The bee routes fall in November and are not missed; the root routes run all winter at a fortnight a message and carry, by the Keeper's estimate, everything that matters.
NOTES ON THE POST
NO CHANNEL PASSES THROUGH CENTRAL PARK. THE PARK IS NOT HOSTILE. IT IS SIMPLY LOUD.
H08 (INWOOD) RECEIVES EVERYTHING LAST.
H07 (THE ALLEY) HEARS EVERYTHING FIRST AND REPEATS NONE OF IT.
N
H01
H02
H03
H04
H05
H06
H07
H08
H09
THE FIELD OF BOXES
THE ROOF FIELD
THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
THE FIRE ESCAPE
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DIAGRAMMATIC · CHANNELS NOT TO SCALE

PLATE M1 · THE POLLEN POST. Eighteen channels are attested. Six are one-way and are drawn as though they were not.

I took the letter to a man in the Parks Department who took it to a woman at the Botanical Garden who told us, in a tone I still resent, that of course they were exchanging pollen, that a bee will work half a mile without complaint, and that this was not communication, it was agriculture.

She was right about the mechanism and wrong about everything else, and the thing that proved her wrong was the lag.

Pollen does not travel in a fixed order. A bee does not visit Broome Street on Tuesday and East Third on Saturday, eleven days later, every time, for four years. But the adoptions came in order, always the same order, with a lag that varied by species and by route and not by season — eleven days for the bee routes, twenty-one for the root, six weeks for the rock, ninety seconds for the tunnels. The lag was the proof. A mechanism produces a distribution. A channel produces a latency.

Adela Quinn died in the ninth year. She never worked again after the car service and she never asked us for anything, and the last time I saw her she was standing on Suffolk Street in November

looking at a hundred-foot square of grass and bare lath with her hands in her pockets, and she said to me, without turning round: they're still at it, you know. Underground.

XII. The Seven Modes

The Register recognises seven.

BEE. Bombus impatiens, worker. April to October. Nine to forty minutes over the routes we have. The fastest of the warm-weather modes and the least reliable, because it fails absolutely in November and does not resume until the ground is fourteen degrees. Everything urgent goes by bee and nothing important does.

WIND. The prevailing north-west. All year, under four minutes. Only between the high houses — the Roof Field, the Triangle, the Traffic Island — and only in the direction the wind is going, which is why three of our eighteen channels are drawn as two-way on the plate and are not.

ROOT. The mycorrhizal network under the pavement, which nobody laid and nobody maintains and which the Water Board has twice cut through and twice been obliged to reroute around. Eleven to twenty-six days. All year. Slow, absolute, and the only mode that works in the eleven weeks. Everything that matters goes by root.

RIVER. The Hudson at slack water. Two hours. The Pier to the Traffic Island, and the Pier to the Alley by way of the harbour. The mechanism is not understood, is not disputed, and is not my department.

BEDROCK. Manhattan schist, by conduction. November to March only, six weeks a message. Two channels: the Cut to the Party Wall House, and the Stem to the Party Wall House. It cannot carry anything complicated. What it carries is temperature and the fact of being there.

PIGEON. Columba livia, unpaid. Twenty minutes. Attested by photograph, entered in the Register over the objection of two supervisors, and defended by me at a hearing in the seventh year at which I was asked whether I understood that this was a legal document and I said yes.

DRAUGHT. The draught of the 1 and the F. Ninety seconds. The fastest thing on the post. It carries almost nothing — a word, a temperature, an alarm — and it carries it before anyone has finished thinking it.

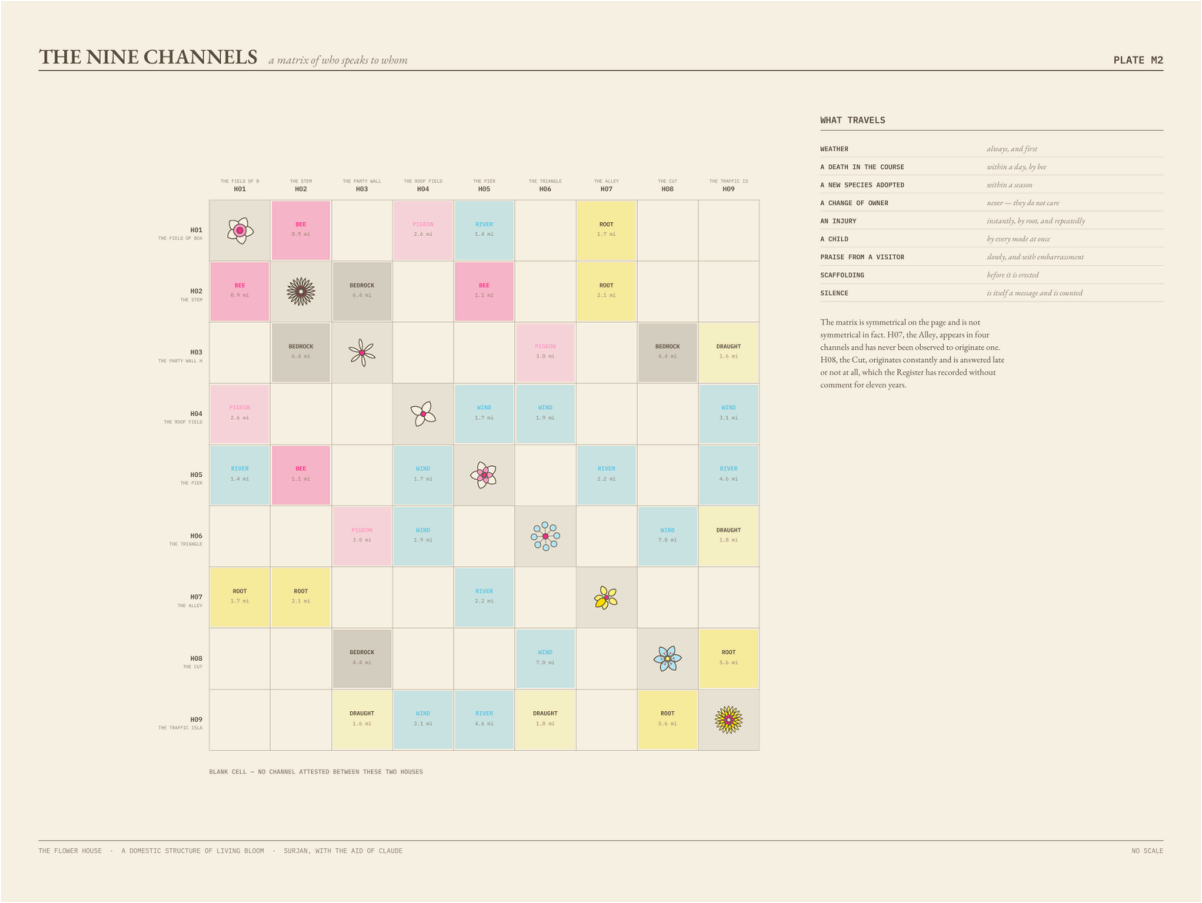

THE NINE CHANNELS
a matrix of who speaks to whom
PLATE M2
H01 H02 H03 H04 H05 H06 H07 H08 H09
WHAT TRAVELS
WEATHER always, and first
A DEATH IN THE COURSE within a day, by bee
A NEW SPECIES ADOPTED within a season
A CHANGE OF OWNER never — they do not care
AN INJURY instantly, by root, and repeatedly
A CHILD by every mode at once
PRAISE FROM A VISITOR slowly, and with embarrassment
SCAFFOLDING before it is erected
SILENCE is itself a message and is counted
The matrix is symmetrical on the page and is not symmetrical in fact. H07, the Alley, appears in four channels and has never been observed to originate one. H08, the Cut, originates constantly and is answered late or not at all, which the Register has recorded without comment for eleven years.
BLANK CELL — NO CHANNEL ATTESTED BETWEEN THESE TWO HOUSES
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
NO SCALE

PLATE M2 · THE NINE CHANNELS. A blank cell means no channel is attested between those two houses.

What travels: weather, always and first. A death in the course, within a day, by bee. A new species adopted, within a season. An injury, instantly, by root, and repeatedly. A child, by every mode at once. Scaffolding, before it is erected — I do not know how and I have stopped asking. Praise from a visitor, slowly, and with embarrassment. A change of owner: never. They do not care who owns them and they have never once mentioned it.

XIII. The Matrix

Of the thirty-six possible pairs among nine houses, eighteen are attested. The matrix on the facing plate is symmetrical on the page and is not symmetrical in fact.

Some houses are hubs. The Field of Boxes appears in five channels and originates in four of them. The Traffic Island appears in four and originates in all four, which for a building that stands

in a plough route and loses a quarter of its course to salt every March is either courage or a nervous condition.

Some are termini. The Cut receives everything last and originates constantly. The Alley receives on four and originates on none.

And some pairs never speak at all. The Roof Field and the Alley have stood a mile and three quarters apart for eight years with no attested channel between them. There is no obstacle: the root network runs under both, the wind serves one, the harbour serves the other. They simply do not.

I record this because the form has a field for it, and because in the ninth year the Roof Field and the Alley produced, between them, a house.

XIV. What Was Said in January

I set out below the whole of the traffic recorded on all modes between the first of January and the twenty-eighth of February in a single year. Thirteen messages in fifty-nine days.

WHAT WAS SAID IN JANUARY *a page of the Register* — PLATE M9

The root channel runs all winter at eleven to twenty-six days a message. What follows is the whole of the traffic recorded between the first of January and the twenty-eighth of February in a single year, in the order it arrived, with the mode and the elapsed time as measured. Nothing has been added. The gaps are in the original.

DATE	FROM	TO	MODE	ELAPSED	THE MESSAGE, AS RECEIVED
3 JAN	H08	H03	BEDROCK	41 days	It is colder here than it is there.
9 JAN	H01	H07	ROOT	16 days	Somebody has left a bicycle against me.
11 JAN	H09	H06	DRAUGHT	90 sec	Salt.
11 JAN	H06	H09	DRAUGHT	90 sec	Salt here too. It will be June before we know.
19 JAN	H05	—	RIVER	—	The river is moving under me and I am not.
22 JAN	H03	H08	BEDROCK	—	*(no reply recorded)*
30 JAN	H02	H01	ROOT	21 days	The child on the second floor has learned my species.
2 FEB	H04	H01	PIGEON	20 min	Scaffolding. Not on me. On the one next door.
7 FEB	H07	—	—	—	*(silence, as recorded, and counted)*
14 FEB	H01	ALL	ROOT	11–26 d	Twenty-two days to the Traffic Island. Begin.
20 FEB	H09	ALL	DRAUGHT	90 sec	I have started. Do not wait for me.
26 FEB	H04	ALL	WIND	4 min	Up here it is already happening.
28 FEB	H08	H03	BEDROCK	—	It is still colder here than it is there.

Thirteen messages in fifty-nine days. The Keeper notes that the traffic of a single afternoon in July would fill this plate four hundred times over, and that nobody has ever asked to see that. It is the winter page people ask for. It is the one they copy out and keep.

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE — TRANSCRIBED FROM THE ROOT CHANNEL

PLATE M9 · WHAT WAS SAID IN JANUARY. Nothing has been added. The gaps are in the original.

The traffic of a single afternoon in July would fill that plate four hundred times over. Nobody has ever asked to see it. It is the winter page people ask for; it is the one they copy out and keep; there is a version of it screen-printed on a tea towel sold at a shop on Orchard Street without our permission and I have bought two.

I am aware of what a page like that does. Thirteen short sentences with dates on them, in a form, is a shape people already know how to read, and what they read into it is a family at Christmas: the one who complains about the cold, the one who says nothing, the one who announces things nobody asked about, the one who says begin.

I have no defence against that reading and I do not think it needs one. The Register does not say the houses are people. The Register says that on the third of January a message travelled four and a half miles through rock at a rate of six weeks, and that it concerned the temperature, and that it had been sent before, and that it was sent again eight weeks later in almost the same words.

What you make of that is a matter for you and is, in my experience, the whole of what this city has made of these nine buildings.

XV. The Quarrel of the Ninth Year

I include this chapter because to leave it out would be to make the Register a promotional document, which it is not.

In the spring of the ninth year the Field of Boxes sent its usual message on the fourteenth of February — twenty-two days to the Traffic Island, begin — and the Traffic Island did not begin. It was late by nineteen days. The salt of that winter had been unusually heavy and the median had been ploughed onto it four times.

On the eleventh of March the Field of Boxes sent again, by root: begin. On the second of April, again: begin. On the twenty-first of April, again.

It is the only instance in eleven years of a message being repeated four times, and it is the only instance of a house being, and I use the word deliberately, wrong. The Traffic Island was not idle. It was hurt. What it eventually sent, on the ninth of May, was the shortest entry in the Register:

Not everything is a decision.

And then it flowered, on the nineteenth of May, a week early, and burnt out by the second week of November, three weeks early, and lost eleven species that year which took four seasons to come back.

The Field of Boxes has never since sent the February message to the Traffic Island. It sends it to the other seven. The Traffic Island is left off, every year, deliberately, and every year the Traffic Island starts first anyway and announces it to everybody:

I have started. Do not wait for me.

I have watched two buildings maintain an apology for three years without either of them being able to say the word, and I have filed it under Correspondence, Anomalous, and gone home.

XVI. The Root Network

I want to describe the thing under the streets, because it is the only channel that matters and because almost nobody who visits these houses knows it is there.

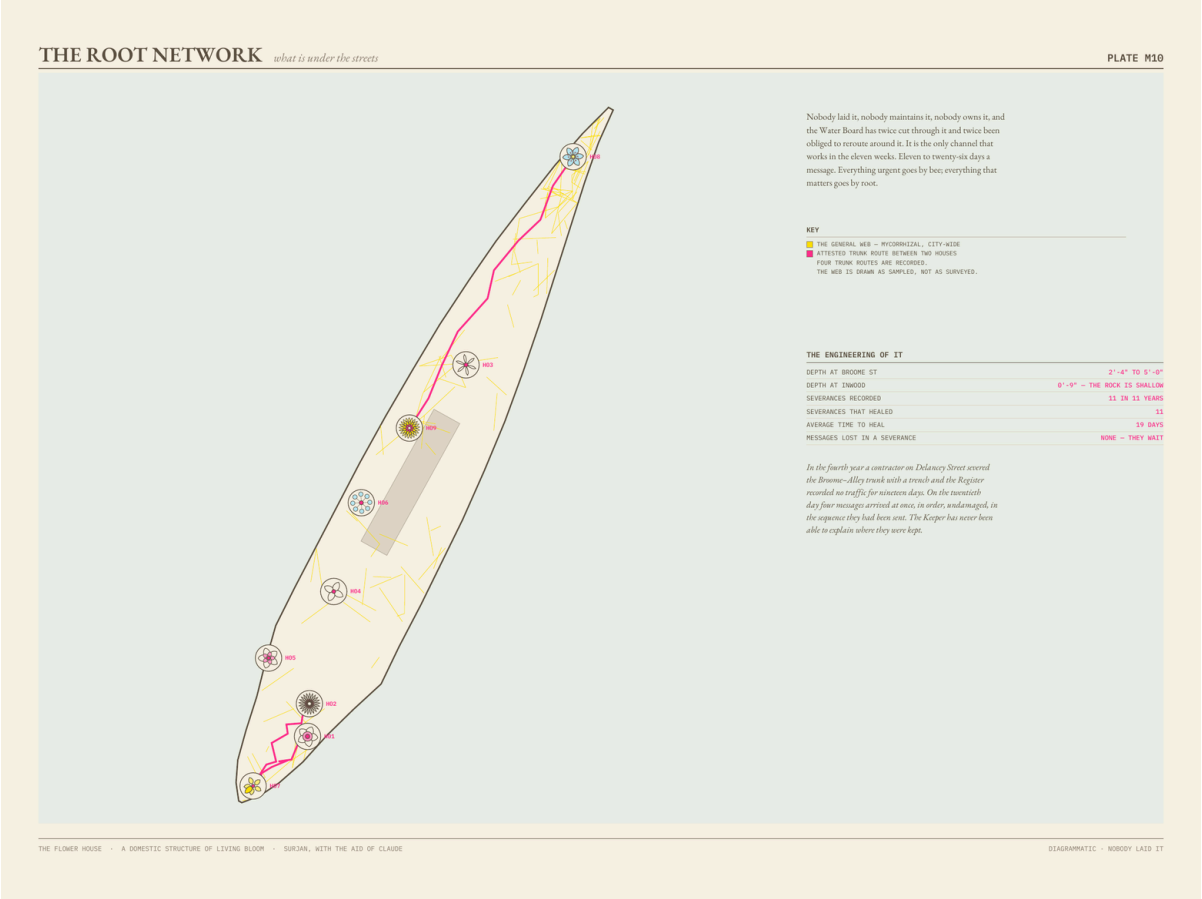

THE ROOT NETWORK what is under the streets
PLATE M10
Nobody laid it, nobody maintains it, and the Water Board has twice cut through it and twice been obliged to reroute around it. It is the only channel that works in the eleven weeks. Eleven to twenty-six days a message. Everything urgent goes by bee; everything that matters goes by root.
KEY
THE GENERAL WEB — MYCORRHIZAL, CITY-WIDE
ATTESTED TRUNK ROUTE BETWEEN TWO HOUSES
FOUR TRUNK ROUTES ARE RECORDED.
THE WEB IS DRAWN AS SAMPLED, NOT AS SURVEYED.
THE ENGINEERING OF IT
DEPTH AT BROOME ST 2'-4" TO 5'-0"
DEPTH AT INWOOD 0'-9" — THE ROCK IS SHALLOW
SEVERANCES RECORDED 11 IN 11 YEARS
SEVERANCES THAT HEALED 11
AVERAGE TIME TO HEAL 19 DAYS
MESSAGES LOST IN A SEVERANCE NONE — THEY WAIT
In the fourth year a contractor on Delancey Street severed the Broome-Alley trunk with a trench and the Register recorded no traffic for nineteen days. On the twentieth day four messages arrived at once, in order, undamaged, in the sequence they had been sent. The Keeper has never been able to explain where they were kept.
H06
H03
H09
H04
H05
H02
H01
H07
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DIAGRAMMATIC · NOBODY LAID IT

PLATE M10 · THE ROOT NETWORK. Nobody laid it, nobody maintains it, and the Water Board has twice been obliged to reroute around it.

Under the pavements of this city there is a mycorrhizal web. It is not ours. It was here before the flower houses and before the grid, it runs under Delancey Street and under the Bowery and under the yards behind the tenements, and it has been carrying signals between plants since before there was anything here to signal about. The nine houses did not build it. They plugged into it, the way a tenant plugs into a riser he did not pay for.

It runs at eleven to twenty-six days a message. It runs in January. It runs when the ground is frozen at the surface, because at four feet down the ground is not frozen and never has been in this city, and four feet down is where the trunk routes lie between Broome Street and Stone Street.

Four such trunk routes are attested. The Field of Boxes to the Stem. The Stem to the Alley. The Field of Boxes to the Alley. The Cut to everything, badly, through nine inches of soil over rock.

In the fourth year a contractor on Delancey Street cut the Broome-to-Alley trunk with a trench for a water connection, and the Register recorded no traffic on that route for nineteen days. On the

twentieth day four messages arrived at once. In order. Undamaged. In the sequence in which they had been sent.

I have never been able to establish where they were kept.

I put this to the woman at the Botanical Garden, the one who told us in the fourth year that this was agriculture and not communication, and who has since become something like a colleague and something like a friend. She said that a network of that kind has no memory and cannot buffer, that what I was describing was impossible, and that she would look into it. She looked into it for two years. Her paper on the subject is eleven pages long and its conclusion, which I have framed, is that the mechanism is not understood, that the observation is not in doubt, and that these two facts are going to have to sit next to each other for a while.

I like her enormously.

XVII. The Hour of the Bee

A summer day on the post, from the first bee to the last.

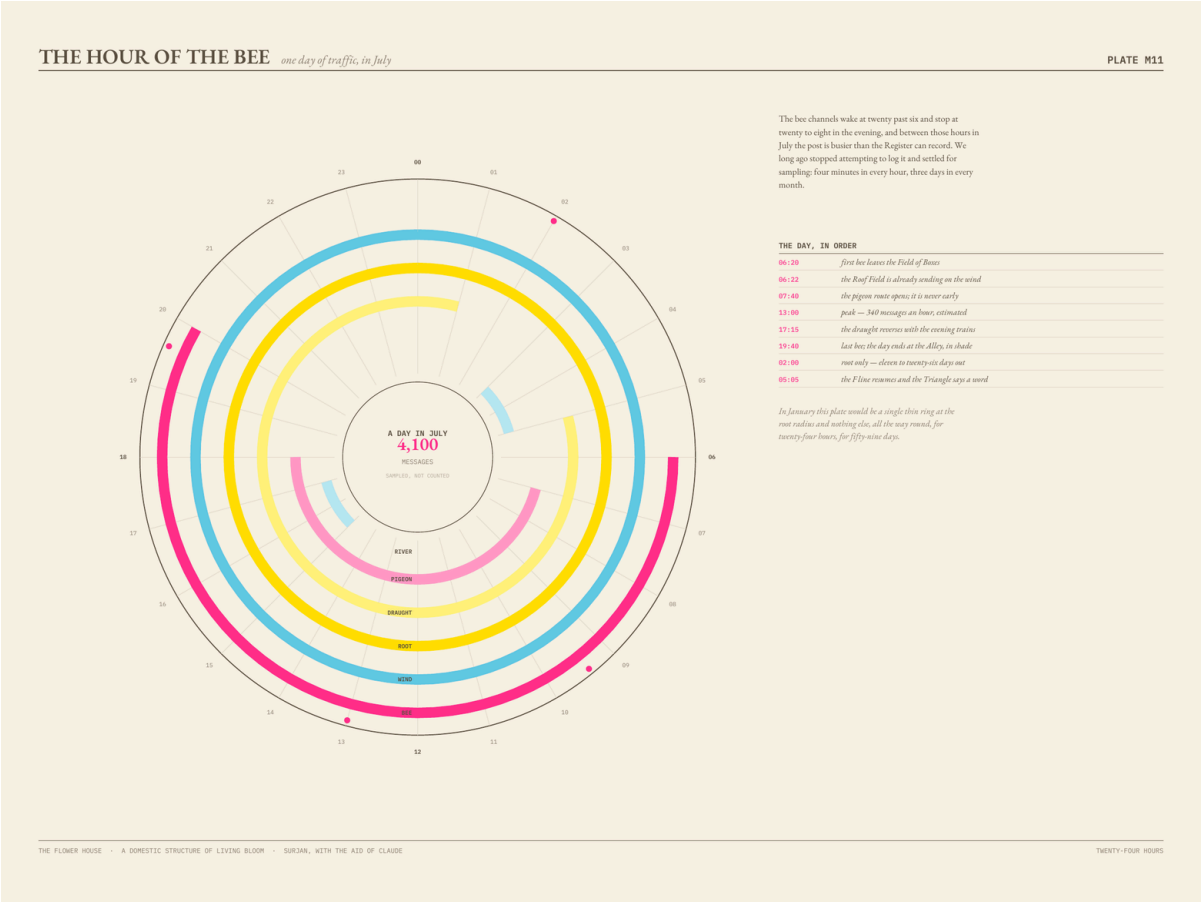

THE HOUR OF THE BEE
one day of traffic, in July
PLATE M11
The bee channels wake at twenty past six and stop at twenty to eight in the evening, and between those hours in July the post is busier than the Register can record. We long ago stopped attempting to log it and settled for sampling: four minutes in every hour, three days in every month.
THE DAY, IN ORDER
06:20 first bee leaves the Field of Boxes
06:22 the Roof Field is already sending on the wind
07:40 the pigeon route opens; it is never early
13:00 peak — 340 messages an hour, estimated
17:15 the draught reverses with the evening trains
19:40 last bee; the day ends at the Alley, in shade
02:00 rout only — eleven to twenty-six days out
05:05 the Fline resumes and the Triangle says a word
In January this plate would be a single thin ring at the root radius and nothing else, all the way round, for twenty-four hours, for fifty-nine days.
A DAY IN JULY
4,100
MESSAGES
SAMPLED, NOT COUNTED
RIVER
PIGEON
DRAUGHT
ROOT
WIND
RICE
00
01
02
03
04
05
06
07
08
09
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

PLATE M11 · THE HOUR OF THE BEE. Four minutes in every hour, three days in every month. We stopped attempting to log it in the fifth year.

At twenty past six in the morning the first bombus leaves the Field of Boxes. It does not know it is a postman and I want to be clear that I make no claim that it does. What it does is work a route, and the route is fixed by the same forces that fix any bee's route — reward, distance, memory — and the nine houses have arranged themselves, or have been arranged, so that the reward on the route between two of them is worth the distance.

By twenty past six the Roof Field has already been sending for two hours, because wind does not sleep. The pigeon route opens at about a quarter to eight and is never early. By one in the afternoon the post is carrying, at our best estimate, three hundred and forty messages an hour, of which we log fourteen.

At a quarter past five the draught in the tunnels reverses with the evening trains and the Triangle and the Traffic Island, which have been exchanging almost nothing all day, exchange a great deal in ninety-second bursts for about forty minutes.

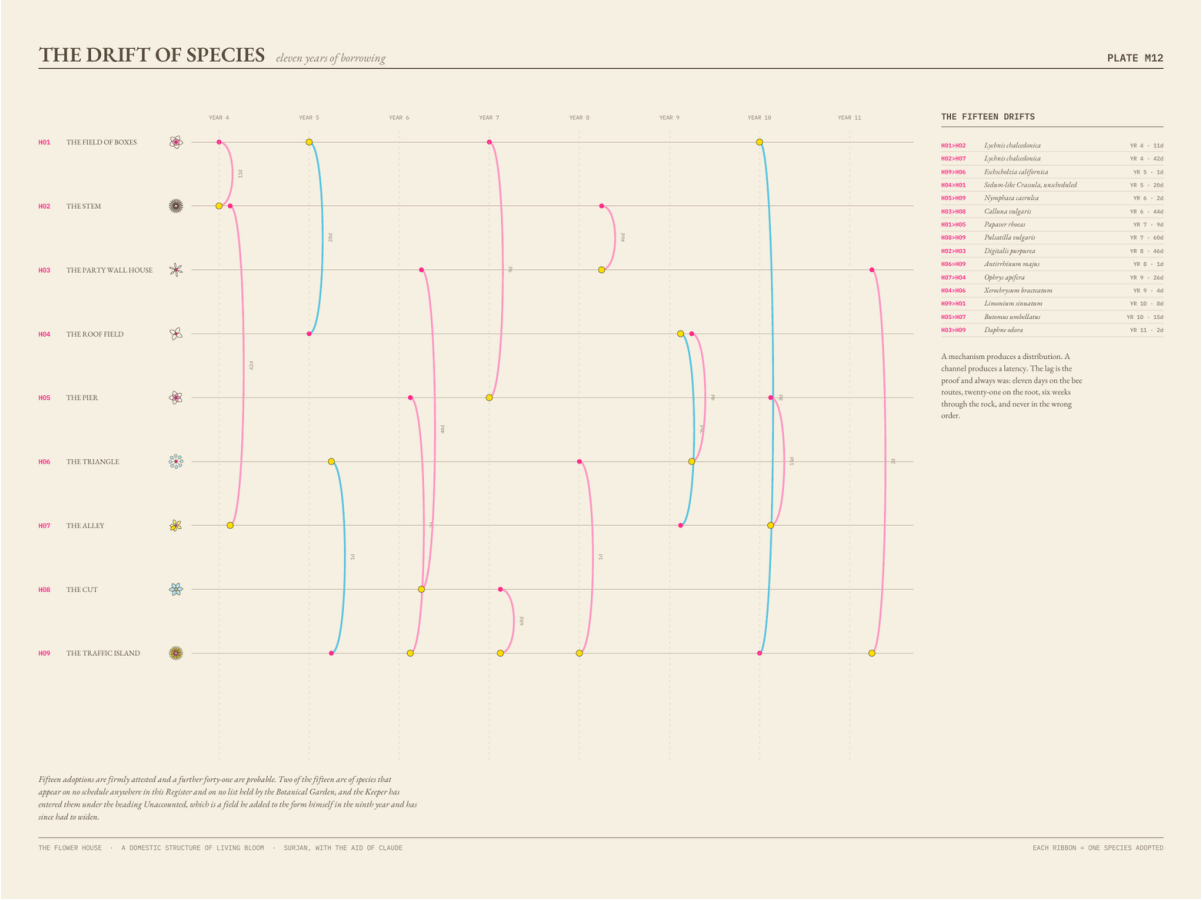
At twenty to eight the last bee comes off, in shade, at the Alley, which is where the day always ends because it is the darkest of the nine.

And then from eight in the evening until dawn there is only root, at eleven to twenty-six days a message, which is not a thing that happens at night so much as a thing that is always happening and is only audible when everything else stops.

I have been at Broome Street at two in the morning in July with a clipboard and nothing to write on it, which is the correct condition for a clerk, and I have found the silence up there — the bee silence, the loud kind of silence, the silence of a hundred and forty thousand flowers standing perfectly still in the dark with something moving under them at three weeks a message — to be the single most companionable experience of my working life.

XVIII. The Drift of Species

The proof of the post is not that species move. It is that they move in order.


THE DRIFT OF SPECIES
eleven years of borrowing
PLATE M12
YEAR 4
YEAR 5
YEAR 6
YEAR 7
YEAR 8
YEAR 9
YEAR 10
YEAR 11
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES
H02 THE STEM
H03 THE PARTY WALL HOUSE
H04 THE ROOF FIELD
H05 THE PIER
H06 THE TRIANGLE
H07 THE ALLEY
H08 THE CUT
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
THE FIFTEEN DRIFTS
H01→H02 Lychnis chalcedonica YR 4 · 11d
H02→H07 Lychnis chalcedonica YR 4 · 42d
H09→H06 Eschscholzia californica YR 5 · 1d
H04→H01 Sedum-like Crassula, unidentified YR 5 · 20d
H05→H09 Nymphaea caerulea YR 6 · 2d
H03→H08 Calluna vulgaris YR 6 · 44d
H01→H05 Papaver rhoeas YR 7 · 9d
H08→H09 Pulsatilla vulgaris YR 7 · 60d
H02→H03 Digitalis purpurea YR 8 · 46d
H06→H09 Antirrhinum majus YR 8 · 1d
H07→H04 Ophrys apifera YR 9 · 26d
H04→H06 Xerochrysum bracteatum YR 9 · 4d
H09→H01 Limonium sinuatum YR 10 · 8d
H05→H07 Butomus umbellatus YR 10 · 15d
H02→H09 Daphne odora YR 11 · 2d
A mechanism produces a distribution. A channel produces a latency. The lag is the proof and always was: eleven days on the bee routes, twenty-one on the root, six weeks through the rock, and never in the wrong order.
Fifteen adoptions are firmly attested and a further forty-one are probable. Two of the fifteen are of species that appear on no schedule anywhere in this Register and on no list held by the Botanical Garden, and the Keeper has entered them under the heading Unaccounted, which is a field he added to the form himself in the ninth year and has since had to widen.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
EACH RIBBON = ONE SPECIES ADOPTED

Fifteen adoptions are firmly attested. A further forty-one are probable and are recorded as such. Each is a species that appeared in one house and then, after a lag which is characteristic of the route and not of the season, appeared in another.

Lychnis chalcedonica, number 168, scarlet, ordinary: Field of Boxes to Stem in eleven days in the fourth year, Stem to Alley in forty-two days in the same season, and then it sat in the Alley for three years doing badly in the shade and was not passed on. Eschscholzia californica: Traffic Island to Triangle, one day, by the tunnels, which is the only same-week adoption in the record. Ophrys apifera, the bee orchid, which is a flower that has spent several million years pretending to be an insect: Alley to Roof Field in the ninth year, twenty-six days, by a route we cannot identify, between two houses that have no attested channel.

I have put that last one in a paragraph of its own because it deserves one. The Alley and the Roof Field do not speak. They have never spoken. In the ninth year one of them gave the other a flower that had spent five million years learning to look like the thing that carries it, and five years later the two of them made a house together at Newtown Creek.

Two of the fifteen adoptions are of species that appear on no schedule anywhere in this Register and on no list held by the Botanical Garden. I have entered them under a heading called Unaccounted, which is Field 42, which I added to the form myself in the ninth year without asking anybody, and which I have since had to widen.

XIX. On Being Wrong About the Post

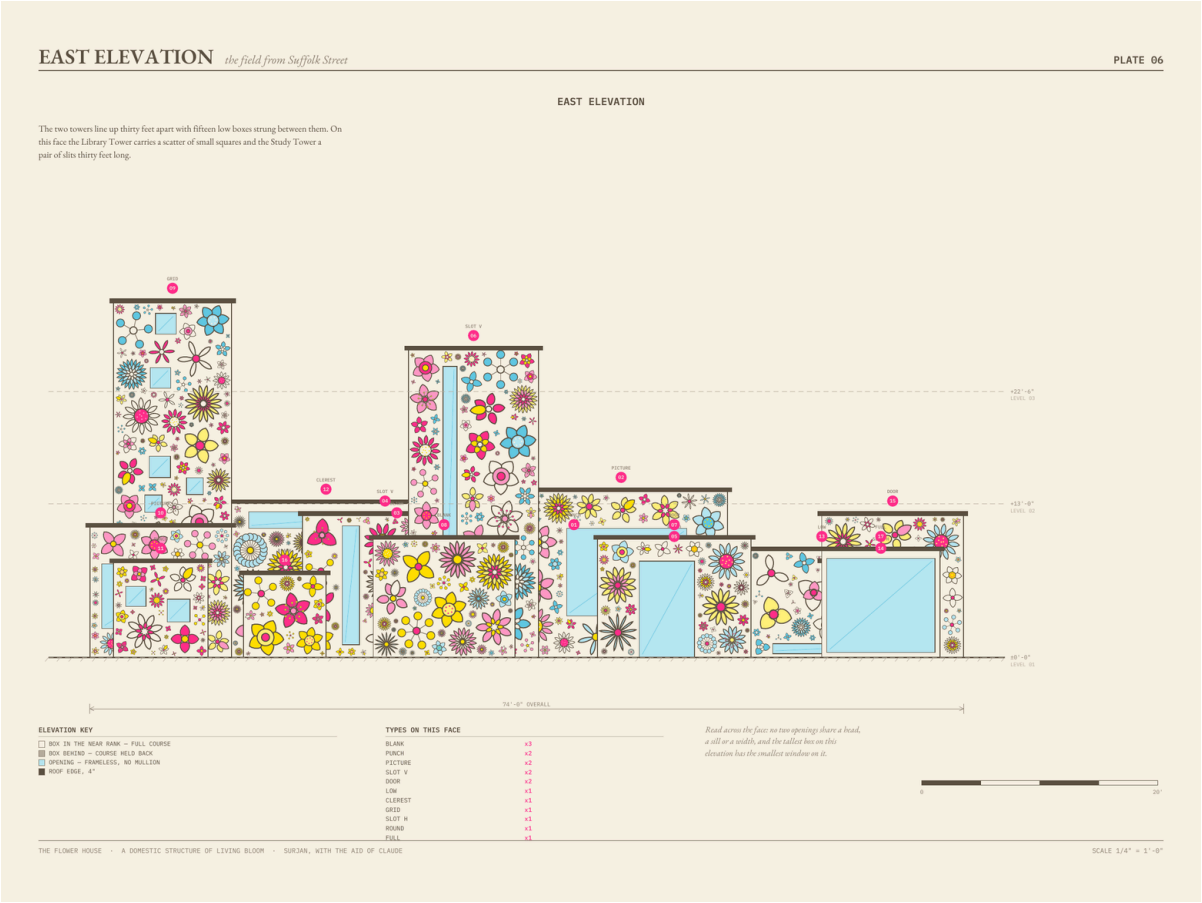

EAST ELEVATION the field from Suffolk Street
PLATE 06
EAST ELEVATION
The two towers line up thirty feet apart with fifteen low boxes strung between them. On this face the Library Tower carries a scatter of small squares and the Study Tower a pair of slits thirty feet long.
74'-0" OVERALL
ELEVATION KEY
BOX IN THE NEAR RANK — FULL COURSE
BOX BEHIND — COURSE HELD BACK
OPENING — FRAMELESS, NO MULLION
ROOF EDGE, 4"
TYPES ON THIS FACE
BLANK x3
PUNCH x2
PICTURE x2
SLOT V x2
DOOR x2
LOW x1
CLEREST x1
GRID x1
SLOT H x1
ROUND x1
FULL x1
Read across the face: no two openings share a head, a sill or a width, and the tallest box on this elevation has the smallest window on it.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

PLATE 06 · EAST ELEVATION. On this face the Library Tower carries a scatter of small squares and the Study Tower a pair of slits thirty feet long.

I have been wrong four times in a way that reached print, and a Register that does not record its own errors is not a Register.

In the fifth year I published a note claiming a channel between the Cut and the Pier, on the strength of two adoptions with a matching lag. There is no such channel. The two adoptions were both from the Field of Boxes, which had passed the same species to both houses by two different routes in the same fortnight, and I had reasoned backwards from a coincidence in exactly the way I would have criticised in anybody else.

In the sixth year I recorded the pigeon mode as seasonal. It is not. It runs all year and I had simply not been logging in January, because I had assumed that nothing runs in January, which is the error of a man who works Monday to Friday.

In the seventh year I asserted, in a memorandum to a supervisor, that the houses do not respond to human presence. Three months later the Bloom Watch demonstrated, with photographs and a protractor, that the crown species on the south face of the Alley leans four

degrees further into the mouth of the alley on the ninth of August than on any other day of the year, and has done for six years, and that the ninth of August is the Night of the Narrow.

Four degrees. Fourteen people. Four minutes each.

I withdrew the memorandum in writing and the withdrawal is Field 41, Remarks, on the seventh-year form for Structure H07, and it says: the Keeper was mistaken; see attached.

And in the ninth year I told a hearing, under oath, that there was no evidence that the structures were reproducing. That was true on the day I said it and I knew that the four boxes under the viaduct at Twentieth Street had been standing for three years, and I said it anyway, because I had been asked a question about evidence and I gave an answer about evidence, and I have never been comfortable with the distance between those two things.

I set these down because the Bloom Watch would set them down if I did not, and because I would rather be corrected in my own book.

BOOK THREE · THE YEAR

In which the seasons of the nine are set out, together with the eleven weeks, the nine feast days, and the instruments of the city's pride.

XX. The Calendar

The nine do not bloom together and never have.

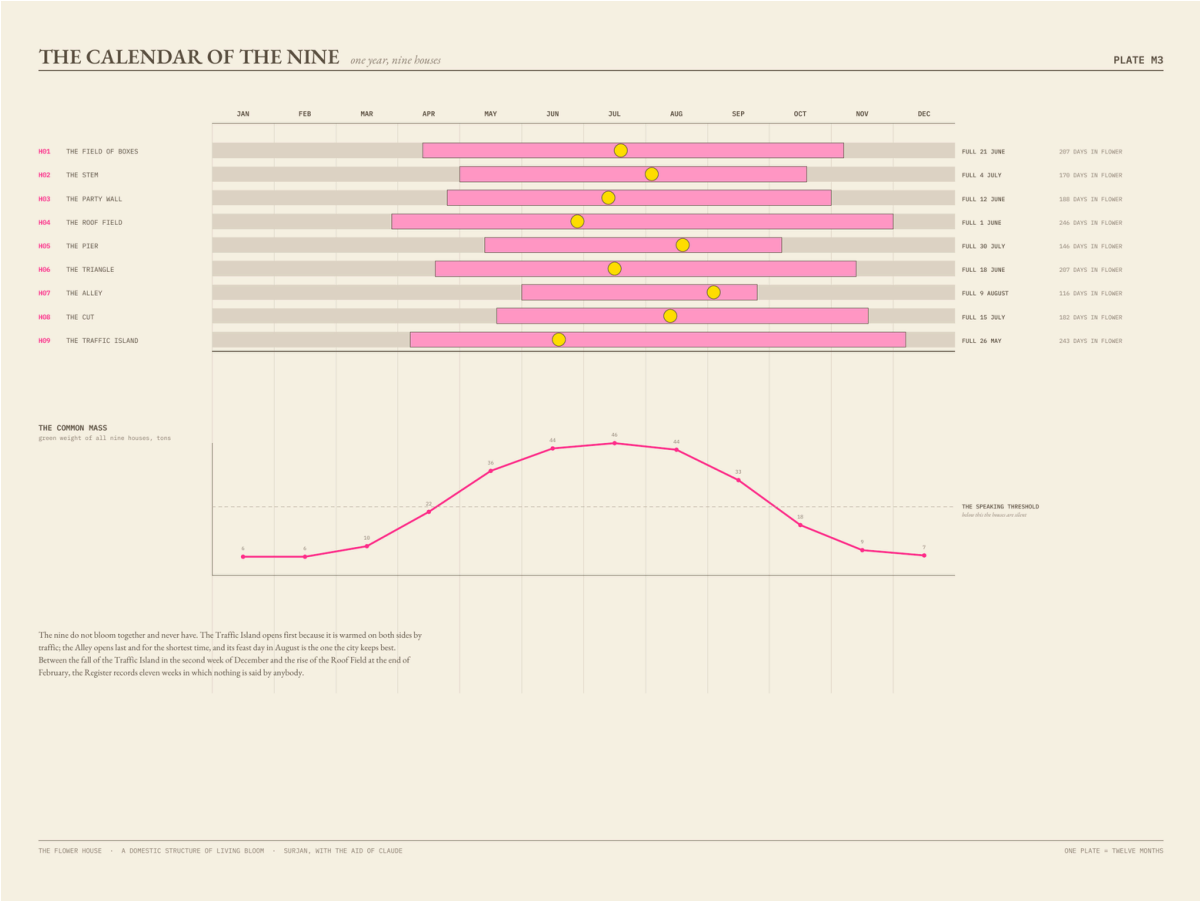

THE CALENDAR OF THE NINE
one year, nine houses
PLATE M3
JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES
FULL 21 JUNE
207 DAYS IN FLOWER
H02 THE STEM
FULL 4 JULY
170 DAYS IN FLOWER
H03 THE Pparty WALL
FULL 12 JUNE
188 DAYS IN FLOWER
H04 THE ROOF FIELD
FULL 1 JUNE
246 DAYS IN FLOWER
H05 THE PIER
FULL 30 JULY
146 DAYS IN FLOWER
H06 THE TRIANGLE
FULL 18 JUNE
207 DAYS IN FLOWER
H07 THE ALLEY
FULL 9 AUGUST
116 DAYS IN FLOWER
H08 THE CUT
FULL 15 JULY
182 DAYS IN FLOWER
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
FULL 26 MAY
243 DAYS IN FLOWER
THE COMMON MASS
green weight of all nine houses, tons
THE SPEAKING THRESHOLD
The nine do not bloom together and never have. The Traffic Island opens first because it is warmed on both sides by traffic; the Alley opens last and for the shortest time, and its feast day in August is the one the city keeps best. Between the fall of the Traffic Island in the second week of December and the rise of the Roof Field at the end of February, the Register records eleven weeks in which nothing is said by anybody.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
ONE PLATE = TWELVE MONTHS

PLATE M3 · THE CALENDAR OF THE NINE. One year, nine houses, and the common mass.

The Traffic Island opens first, on the twenty-sixth of May in an average year, because it is warmed on two sides by traffic. The Roof Field puts up its first crown species earlier still, in the last week of February, but it does not come into full course until the first of June, so the calendar gives it second. The Alley opens last, on the ninth of August, and holds for a hundred and fifteen days, which is the

shortest flowering of the nine and the reason its feast is the one the city keeps best: you cannot take it for granted, because it is barely there.

Between them the nine carry, at the peak of the year, forty-six tons of green weight, of which not one ounce is structural. Everything in that number is cladding. If it all fell off in an afternoon — and in a hailstorm in the sixth year a good deal of it did — the buildings would stand, and be lath and glass and rooflight, and be cold, and be perfectly safe, and nobody would want to look at them.

There is a line drawn across the mass chart at a little over half. The Register calls it the speaking threshold. Below it the houses are silent: not because there is nothing to say but because the bee channels have failed, the wind channels carry only the high three, and the root is running at three weeks a message. Above it, in a July afternoon, the post is so busy that we long ago stopped attempting to record it and settled for sampling.

Eleven weeks a year they are silent. Twenty-two weeks a year they are quiet. Nineteen weeks a year they are, to use the word my predecessor used in the file and which I have never been able to improve on, loud.

XXI. The Growing of a Wall

A single south wall of a single box, fourteen feet by eleven, drawn on the first of every month.

THE GROWING OF A WALL one course, one year
PLATE M4
JANUARY
the lath, bare
0 BLOSSOMS
FEBRUARY
first fixings
7 BLOSSOMS
MARCH
the crown species
12 BLOSSOMS
APRIL
the second rank
15 BLOSSOMS
MAY
filling downward
21 BLOSSOMS
JUNE
the openings held
34 BLOSSOMS
JULY
full course
49 BLOSSOMS
AUGUST
full course, held
49 BLOSSOMS
SEPTEMBER
the first loose
24 BLOSSOMS
OCTOBER
thinning
35 BLOSSOMS
NOVEMBER
the last of it
7 BLOSSOMS
DECEMBER
the lath again
0 BLOSSOMS
A single south wall of a single box, drawn on the first of each month. Nothing is added by hand after March; the course fills itself downward from the crown species and stops when it meets the sill. In December the wall is a woven lath and a hole where a window was, and the room behind it is as cold as the street. Every one of the nine does this. It is not a failure of the design and the city has stopped calling the Department about it.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
EACH PANEL 14'-0" x 11'-0"

PLATE M4 · THE GROWING OF A WALL. Nothing is added by hand after March.

In January it is a woven bast lath and a hole where a window was. In February the first fixings go on — this is the only labour in the year, and it is one afternoon and a hundred and forty dollars of seed for a whole house. In March the crown species is set, a foot and a half across, the largest bloom the wall will carry. And then nothing is done at all, ever again, and the wall makes itself.

It fills downward. The rule is that no bloom may touch a bloom of its own species and no bloom may be larger than the gap it is offered, and from those two rules and one crown flower a wall of four thousand blossoms in twenty-eight species assembles itself between April and the third week of June, and stops when it meets the sill.

It stops at the openings too, and this is the part the visitors never believe. The course does not grow over the glass and have to be trimmed. It arrives at the reveal and it stops. A round window in the west wall of the Long Room has, every year, a ring of twenty-four blossoms around it, each turned fifteen degrees from the last, and nobody puts them there.

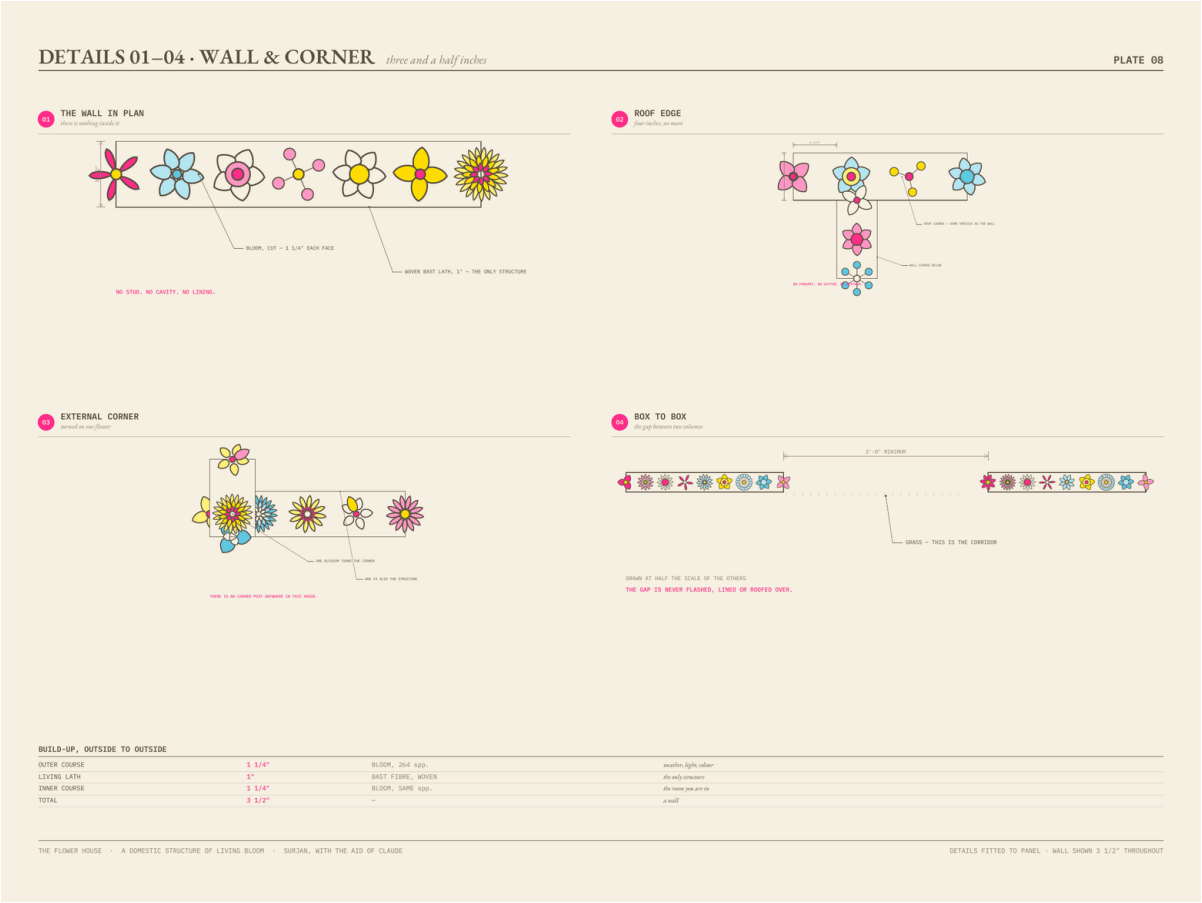

DETAILS 01–04 · WALL & CORNER three and a half inches
PLATE 08
01 THE WALL IN PLAN
there is nothing inside it
BLOOM, CUT – 1 1/4" EACH FACE
WOVEN BAST LATH, 1" – THE ONLY STRUCTURE
NO STUD. NO CAVITY. NO LINING.
02 ROOF EDGE
four inches, no more
3 1/2"
ROOF COURSE – SAME SPECIES AS THE WALL
WALL COURSE BELOW
NO FLASHING. NO GUTTER.
03 EXTERNAL CORNER
turned on one flower
ONE BLOSSOM TURNS THE CORNER
AND IS ALSO THE STRUCTURE
THERE IS NO CORNER POST ANYWHERE IN THIS HOUSE.
04 BOX TO BOX
the gap between two volumes
3'-0" MINIMUM
GRASS – THIS IS THE CORRIDOR
DRAWN AT HALF THE SCALE OF THE OTHERS
THE GAP IS NEVER FLASHED, LINED OR ROOFED OVER.
BUILD-UP, OUTSIDE TO OUTSIDE
OUTER COURSE 1 1/4" BLOOM, 264 spp. weather; light, colour
LIVING LATH 1" BAST FIBRE, WOVEN the only structure
INNER COURSE 1 1/4" BLOOM, SAME spp. the room you are in
TOTAL 3 1/2" – a wall
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DETAILS FITTED TO PANEL · WALL SHOWN 3 1/2" THROUGHOUT

PLATE 08 · DETAILS 01–04 · WALL & CORNER. The corner is turned on a single blossom, which is also the structure.

In September the losses begin. In October it thins. In November there is a fortnight when the wall is mostly lath with about four hundred flowers left on it in no pattern at all, which is the least photographed and, to my eye, the most beautiful state of the whole year, because you can see how it was done.

By December it is a lath again and a hole where a window was.

XXII. The Eleven Weeks

From the eleventh of December to the twenty-sixth of February the nine houses of this city are skeletons.

I have said already that this is the part of the year the Register considers most important and the part nobody comes to see, and I want now to say why, because it is not obvious and it took me eleven years.

In the eleven weeks you can see the buildings.

In July you cannot. In July there is a hundred and forty thousand flowers on the Roof Field and you cannot see the Roof Field; you see colour, and mass, and a general impression of abundance, which is exactly what you would see if the boxes underneath it were badly proportioned or awkwardly placed or too big. In January you see nineteen feet by fourteen of woven lath standing three feet from a box eight feet square, and you can judge it, and the judgement is either yes or no, and there is nowhere to hide.

All nine survive that judgement. This is not sentiment; it is the only real defence of the project as architecture, and it is available for eleven weeks a year to anyone who will put a coat on.

There is a further thing which I record with some hesitation. In the eleven weeks the houses are cold. The owners of six of the nine do not stay. Two families go to relatives; one goes to a sublet on Ninth Avenue; the Pier is simply shut and the keys given to the Department. Only three of the nine are occupied through the whole winter, and one of those three is the Alley, where a man in his seventies lives alone in eight boxes in single file and has done for nine years and describes it as the best months.

The other six come back in March. Every year, all of them, without exception, and I have the forms.

I think that is the fact this book exists to record. Not that a house can be made of flowers — anyone can make anything out of anything for one summer — but that six households in this city voluntarily leave their homes for eleven weeks every winter and voluntarily return, and have done it eleven times, and would riot if you offered to insulate them.

XXIII. The Feast Days

Nine feast days. Not one of them was declared by any authority. All of them were arrived at by the simple method of people turning up.

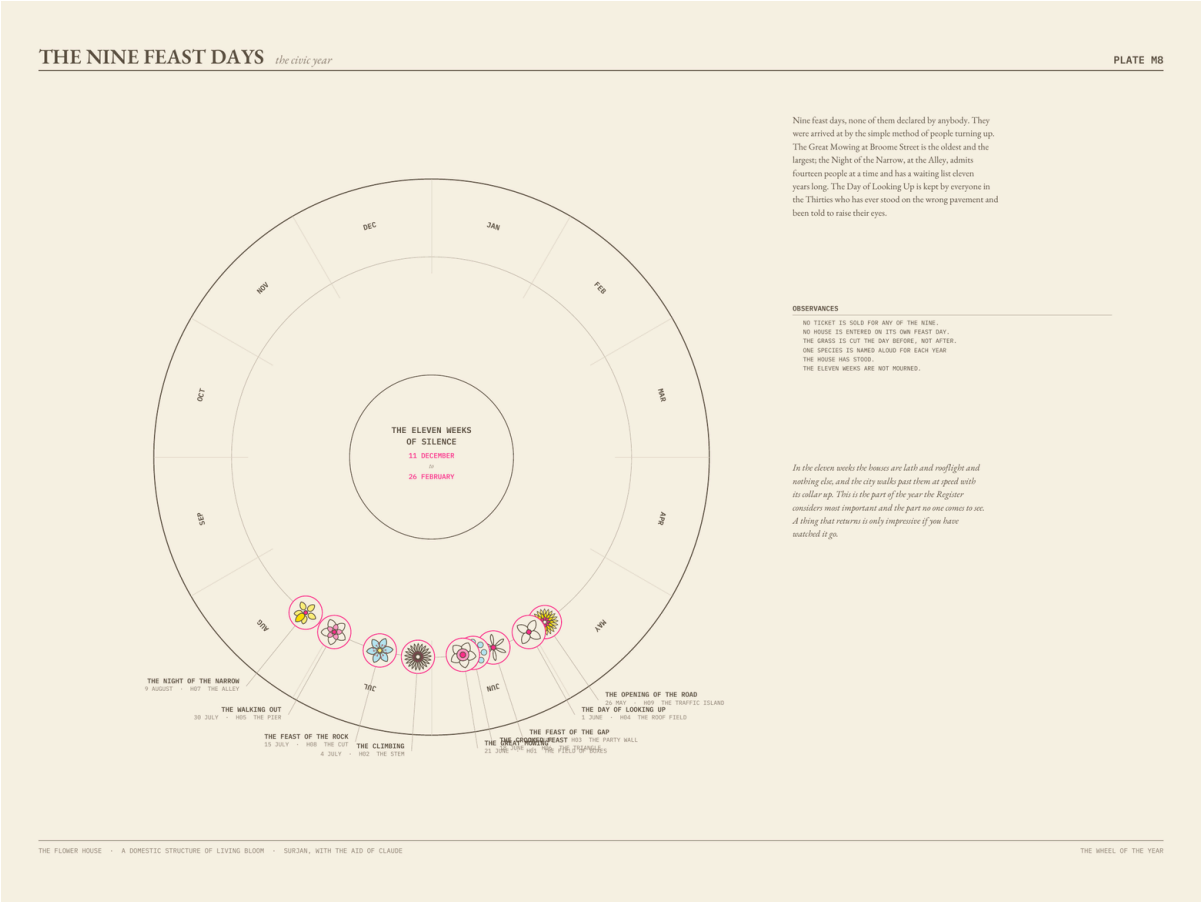

THE NINE FEAST DAYS
the civic year
PLATE M8
Nine feast days, none of them declared by anybody. They were arrived at by the simple method of people turning up. The Great Mowing at Broome Street is the oldest and the largest; the Night of the Narrow, at the Alley, admits fourteen people at a time and has a waiting list eleven years long. The Day of Looking Up is kept by everyone in the Thirties who has ever stood on the wrong pavement and been told to raise their eyes.
OBSERVANCES
NO TICKET IS SOLD FOR ANY OF THE NINE.
NO HOUSE IS ENTERED ON ITS OWN FEAST DAY.
THE GRASS IS CUT THE DAY BEFORE, NOT AFTER.
ONE SPECIES IS NAMED ALOUD FOR EACH YEAR
THE HOUSE HAS STOOD.
THE ELEVEN WEEKS ARE NOT MOURNED.
In the eleven weeks the houses are lath and rooflight and nothing else, and the city walks past them at speed with its collar up. This is the part of the year the Register considers most important and the part no one comes to see. A thing that returns is only impressive if you have watched it go.
DEC
JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
THE ELEVEN WEEKS OF SILENCE
11 DECEMBER
to
26 FEBRUARY
THE NIGHT OF THE NARROW
9 AUGUST · H07 · THE ALLEY
THE WALKING OUT
30 JULY · H06 · THE PIER
THE FEAST OF THE ROCK
15 JULY · H05 · THE CUT
THE CLIMBING
4 JULY · H02 · THE STEM
THE OPENING OF THE ROAD
26 MAY · H09 · THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
THE DAY OF LOOKING UP
1 JUNE · H04 · THE ROOF FIELD
THE FEAST OF THE GAP
12 JUNE · H03 · THE PARTY WALL
THE CROOKED FEAST
21 JUNE · H01 · THE TRIANGLE
THE GREAT MOWING
THE FIELD OF BOXES
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

PLATE M8 · THE NINE FEAST DAYS. The eleven weeks at the centre are not mourned.

The Opening of the Road, the twenty-sixth of May, at the Traffic Island: forty minutes at seven in the morning, six hundred people on two islands and a median, applause, and then the light changes.

The Day of Looking Up, the first of June, at the Roof Field: several thousand people on the wrong pavement with their heads back, seeing nothing.

The Feast of the Gap, the twelfth of June, at the Party Wall House: the smallest and strangest, in which about eighty people take turns to look through a half-inch joint with a torch, from the yard, one at a time.

The Crooked Feast, the eighteenth of June, at the Triangle: nobody knows why it is called that and there is no ceremony. People stand in the point of the lot until they are moved on.

The Great Mowing, the twenty-first of June, at the Field of Boxes: the oldest and the largest. Seven thousand five hundred square feet of grass is cut the day before, not after, and the cuttings are left, and the whole of Broome Street smells of it for a week.

The Climbing, the fourth of July, at the Stem: from the street you can see up through three feet of open air at four levels, and at dusk the lamps come on in the tiers one after another from the bottom, and that is the whole of it, and it takes ninety seconds.

The Feast of the Rock, the fifteenth of July, at the Cut: nine hundred people eating out of foil on four hundred and fifty million years of schist.

The Walking Out, the thirtieth of July, at the Pier: limited since the sixth year to four hundred, ballot, and the ballot is oversubscribed forty to one.

The Night of the Narrow, the ninth of August, at the Alley: fourteen at a time, four minutes each, waiting list eleven years.

There are four observances that are common to all nine and that nobody wrote down. No ticket is sold. No house is entered on its own feast day. The grass is cut the day before, not after. And one species is named aloud for each year the house has stood — so at Broome Street this year a boy of about nine read out eleven names from a card, in Latin, badly, to five hundred people who did not correct him.

XXIV. On Civic Pride, and Its Instruments

I am obliged, as a clerk, to be careful about the word pride, because the Department has a form for public sentiment and it has three boxes and none of them is that.

But I have watched this for eleven years and I know what I am looking at.

Consider the instruments. There is Hector Salgado's exercise book, which is the waiting list for the Night of the Narrow and which he inherited from Adela Quinn and which he will not give to us, correctly. There is the tea towel from Orchard Street with January on it. There is the Bloom Watch, which is four hundred and something people with an email list who report first flowers and last flowers on all nine houses and whose data is better than ours and who have never asked to be paid or thanked or acknowledged, and who correct us, publicly and with relish, roughly twice a year.

There is the fact that a proposal in the eighth year to put a fence around the Field of Boxes drew eleven hundred letters of objection, of which the Department's summary noted that only forty were from the immediate blocks.

There is the man who sweeps the Broome Street pavement, unpaid, who told an inspector that he was not doing it for the house, he was doing it because people came to see the house and the pavement was a disgrace.

There is the thing that happens on the crosstown bus at 106th Street, which is that people who have lived here their whole lives, who are tired, who are going to work, look out of the left-hand window at the third box for the two seconds it takes to pass it.

And there is this. In the sixth year, in the hailstorm, the Roof Field lost about seventy per cent of its course in nineteen minutes. It is a hundred and thirty-eight feet in the air and invisible from the street and it belongs to a private family who have never given an interview. The Department received, over the following four days, six hundred and ten telephone calls asking whether it was all right.

That is what pride is. Not ownership. Not even access. It is the condition of having something in your city that you do not own, cannot enter, had no hand in, and would telephone a municipal office about.

XXV. The Salt

The nine houses have one enemy and it is not weather, and it is not vandalism, and it is not the Landmarks Preservation Commission, with whom relations have been cordial since the fifth year.

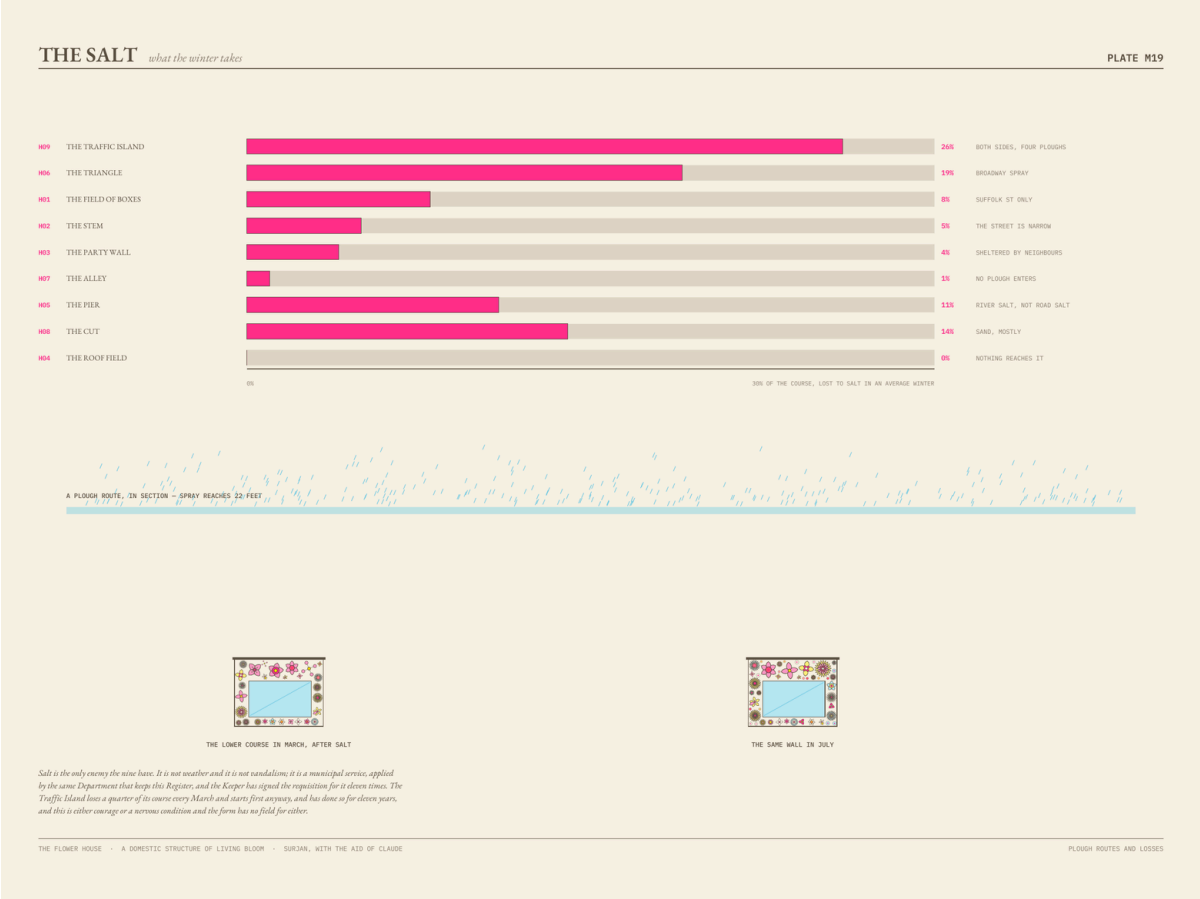

THE SALT what the winter takes
PLATE M19
M09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND 26% BOTH SIDES, FOUR PLOUGHS
M06 THE TRIANGLE 19% BROADWAY SPRAY
M01 THE FIELD OF BOXES 8% SUFFOLK ST ONLY
M02 THE STEM 5% THE STREET IS NARROW
M03 THE PARTY WALL 4% SHELTERED BY NEIGHBOURS
M07 THE ALLEY 1% NO PLOUGH ENTERS
M05 THE PIER 11% RIVER SALT, NOT ROAD SALT
M08 THE CUT 14% SAND, MOSTLY
M04 THE ROOF FIELD 0% NOTHING REACHES IT
0%
30% OF THE COURSE, LOST TO SALT IN AN AVERAGE WINTER
A PLOUGH ROUTE, IN SECTION — SPRAY REACHES 22 FEET
THE LOWER COURSE IN MARCH, AFTER SALT
THE SAME WALL IN JULY
Salt is the only enemy the nine have. It is not weather and it is not vandalism; it is a municipal service, applied by the same Department that keeps this Register, and the Keeper has signed the requisition for it eleven times. The Traffic Island loses a quarter of its course every March and starts first anyway, and has done so for eleven years, and this is either courage or a nervous condition and the form has no field for either.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
PLOUGH ROUTES AND LOSSES

PLATE M19 · THE SALT. It is a municipal service, applied by the Department that keeps this Register, and the Keeper has signed the requisition for it eleven times.

Rock salt is spread on the streets of this city between the first frost and the last, in quantities that vary with the winter and with the budget, and it is thrown from the back of a plough at the speed of a plough, and it reaches twenty-two feet.

The Traffic Island stands in a plough route on both sides. In an average winter it loses twenty-six per cent of its course to salt: the lower six feet of every wall facing an avenue, on seven boxes, every year. In the ninth year, which had four thaws and four re-ploughings, it lost more than a third and eleven species outright, and came into flower nineteen days late, and it was that lateness which caused the quarrel I have described elsewhere.

The Triangle loses nineteen per cent, all of it from the Broadway side. The Field of Boxes loses eight, and only on Suffolk Street. The Alley loses one per cent, because no plough has ever entered it and because Hector Salgado shovels the mouth of it by hand and has done for nine years without being asked and without being paid, using a plastic shovel because the metal one, he says, throws the salt too far.

The Roof Field loses nothing. Nothing reaches it. It is the only one of the nine that has never lost a single blossom to the city's own maintenance, and it is also the only one that nobody can see, and I have thought more than once about the relation between those two facts and have declined to write it down until now.

I have signed the salt requisition eleven times. It is a form with nine fields and my signature is on the sixth line, and the tonnage is on the fourth, and every March I walk to 106th Street and look at what my own signature has done to the lower six feet of a building I care about more than I care about most people, and then I go back to Chambers Street and do it again in November.

That is what it is to work for a city. You are the thing that keeps the roads open and you are the thing that kills the flowers, and there is no arrangement of the paperwork that lets you be only one of them.

XXVI. Nineteen Minutes

On the fourteenth of July of the sixth year, between eighteen forty-one and nineteen hundred hours, hail fell on Manhattan with stones to an inch and a quarter, and for nineteen minutes the Roof Field was struck by roughly four hundred thousand of them.

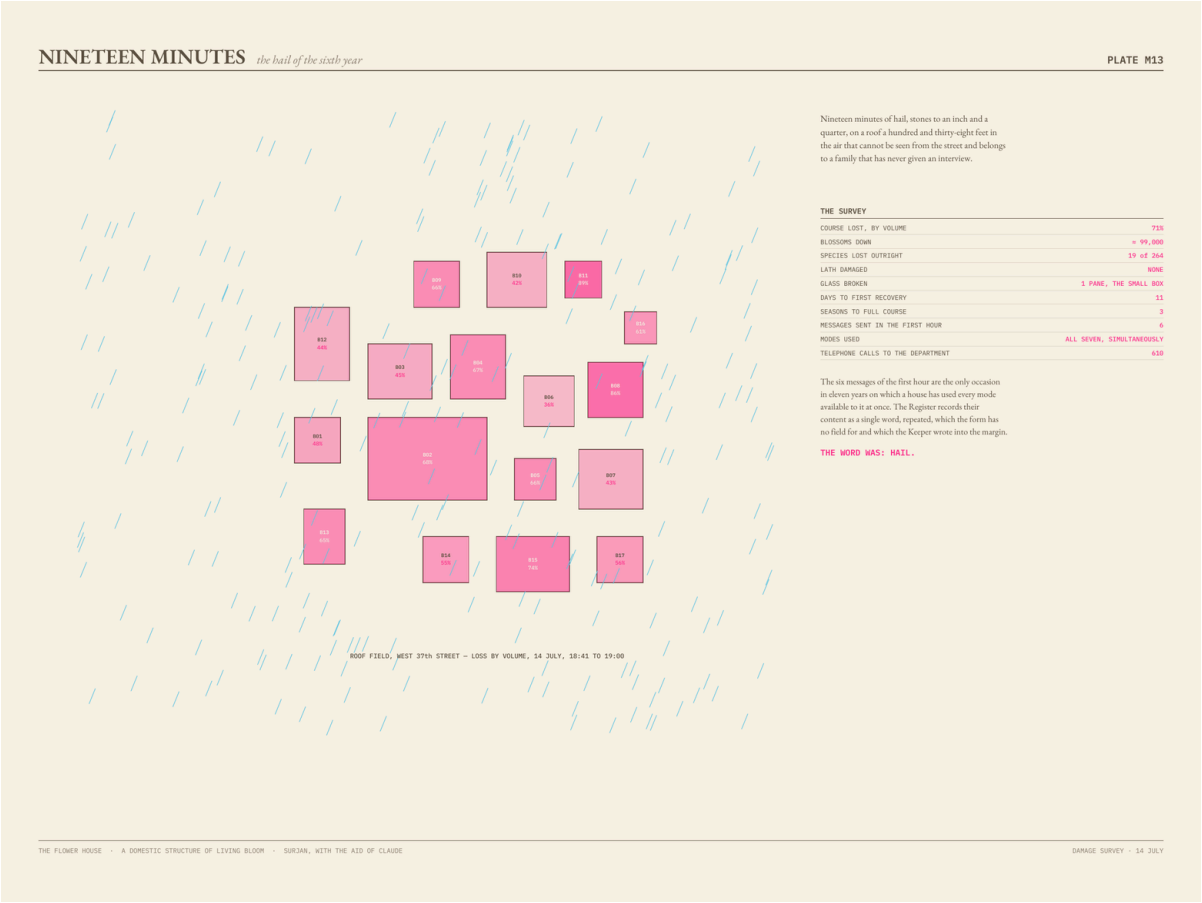

NINETEEN MINUTES
the hail of the sixth year
PLATE M13
Nineteen minutes of hail, stones to an inch and a quarter, on a roof a hundred and thirty-eight feet in the air that cannot be seen from the street and belongs to a family that has never given an interview.
THE SURVEY
COURSE LOST, BY VOLUME 71%
BLOSSOMS DOWN ≈ 99,000
SPECIES LOST OUTRIGHT 19 of 264
LATH DAMAGED NONE
GLASS BROKEN 1 PANE, THE SMALL BOX
DAYS TO FIRST RECOVERY 11
SEASONS TO FULL COURSE 3
MESSAGES SENT IN THE FIRST HOUR 6
MODES USED ALL SEVEN, SIMULTANEOUSLY
TELEPHONE CALLS TO THE DEPARTMENT 610
The six messages of the first hour are the only occasion in eleven years on which a house has used every mode available to it at once. The Register records their content as a single word, repeated, which the form has no field for and which the Keeper wrote into the margin.
THE WORD WAS: HAIL.
ROOF FIELD, WEST 37th STREET — LOSS BY VOLUME, 14 JULY, 18:41 TO 19:00
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DAMAGE SURVEY · 14 JULY

PLATE M13 · NINETEEN MINUTES. Seventy-one per cent of the course lost. The lath undamaged. One pane broken, in the Small Box.

Seventy-one per cent of the course came down. Ninety-nine thousand blossoms, by our estimate, on the tar of a roof a hundred and thirty-eight feet in the air. Nineteen species were lost outright and took three seasons to come back. The lath was not damaged anywhere. One pane of glass broke, in the Small Box, which is seven feet square and holds one chair.

In the first hour after the hail stopped, the Roof Field sent six messages. It used every mode available to it — wind, root, pigeon, and the three it shares with the high houses — simultaneously. This is the only occasion in eleven years on which a house has done that, and the Register's log of the content is a single word repeated six times, and the word is hail.

I do not know what to do with that. It is not a warning; the hail had already fallen on everybody. It is not a request; nothing came back that helped, and nothing could have. It is not information. Six times, in an hour, on every channel it had, to eight buildings that already knew: hail.

And then, over the following four days, the Department of Buildings of the City of New York received six hundred and ten telephone calls from members of the public asking whether the Roof Field was all right.

Six hundred and ten. For a building that cannot be seen from any pavement in this city, that belongs to a family who have never given an interview, that is not open to the public, that has no plaque, that is not landmarked, and that most of the callers could not have found on a map.

We do not have a form for that. I answered eighty of the calls myself, over four days, in a room and a half on the ninth floor, saying the same eleven words each time: the frame is sound, the flowers will be back next year. And on the fourth day a woman on the telephone said thank you and then did not hang up, and after a moment she said, and I have written it in Field 43 because there was nowhere else to put it: I know it's only a roof.

It is not only a roof and she knew that too, and that is why she rang.

XXVII. The Eleven That Do Not Exist

Among the fragments of the tenth house, which I set out at the end of this book, there are eleven species that appear on no schedule anywhere and on no list held by any institution I have been able to write to.

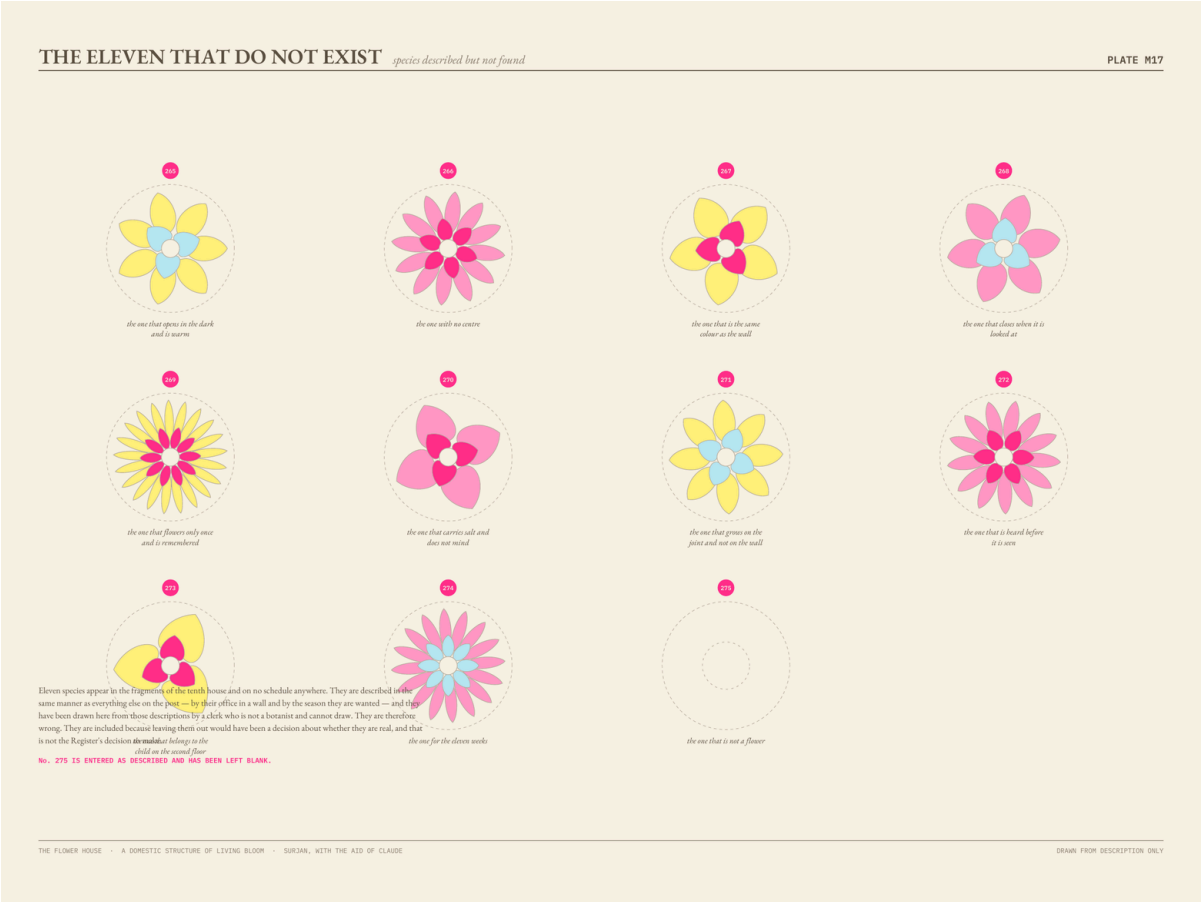

THE ELEVEN THAT DO NOT EXIST species described but not found
PLATE M17
265
the one that opens in the dark and is warm
266
the one with no centre
267
the one that is the same colour as the wall
268
the one that closes when it is looked at
269
the one that flowers only once and is remembered
270
the one that carries salt and does not mind
271
the one that grows on the joint and not on the wall
272
the one that is heard before it is seen
273
the one that belongs to the child on the second floor
274
the one for the eleven weeks
275
the one that is not a flower
Eleven species appear in the fragment of the tenth house and on no schedule anywhere. They are described in the same manner as everything else on the post — by their office in a wall and by the season they are wanted — and they have been drawn here from those descriptions by a clerk who is not a botanist and cannot draw. They are therefore wrong. They are included because leaving them out would have been a decision about whether they are real, and that is not the Register's decision to make.
No. 275 IS ENTERED AS DESCRIBED AND HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DRAWN FROM DESCRIPTION ONLY

PLATE M17 · THE ELEVEN THAT DO NOT EXIST. Drawn from description only, by a clerk who is not a botanist and cannot draw.

They are described on the post in exactly the manner that every real species is described: by the office they hold in a wall, and by the season in which they are wanted. This is the whole of the vocabulary. A flower is not a name on the channels; it is a job and a month.

The one that opens in the dark and is warm. The one with no centre. The one that is the same colour as the wall. The one that closes when it is looked at. The one that flowers only once and is remembered. The one that carries salt and does not mind. The one that grows on the joint and not on the wall. The one that is heard before it is seen. The one that belongs to the child on the second floor. The one for the eleven weeks.

And the eleventh, which is described as the one that is not a flower, and which I have entered as described and left blank.

Two of these are, I think, real and simply not yet catalogued, because two species have entered the drift in the last four years that nobody can put a name to and that the Botanical Garden has looked at and declined to rule on. One of them carries salt and does not mind. It appeared on the

Traffic Island in the tenth year, on the lower course, on the Broadway side, three feet from the ground, in March.

I want to be careful about the sentence I am about to write and I am going to write it anyway. In the year after the Traffic Island lost a third of its course to my signature, a flower arrived on the part of the wall that the salt reaches, which is not on any schedule, and which the salt does not kill.

The other nine I make no claim about at all. The one that flowers only once and is remembered is not, on any reading I can construct, a botanical description. Neither is the one for the eleven weeks. I have drawn them because leaving them out would have been a decision about whether they are real, and that is not the Register's decision to make, and I am not going to make it in a municipal document, and I have made it privately, and I am not going to say which way.

XXVIII. The Mowing

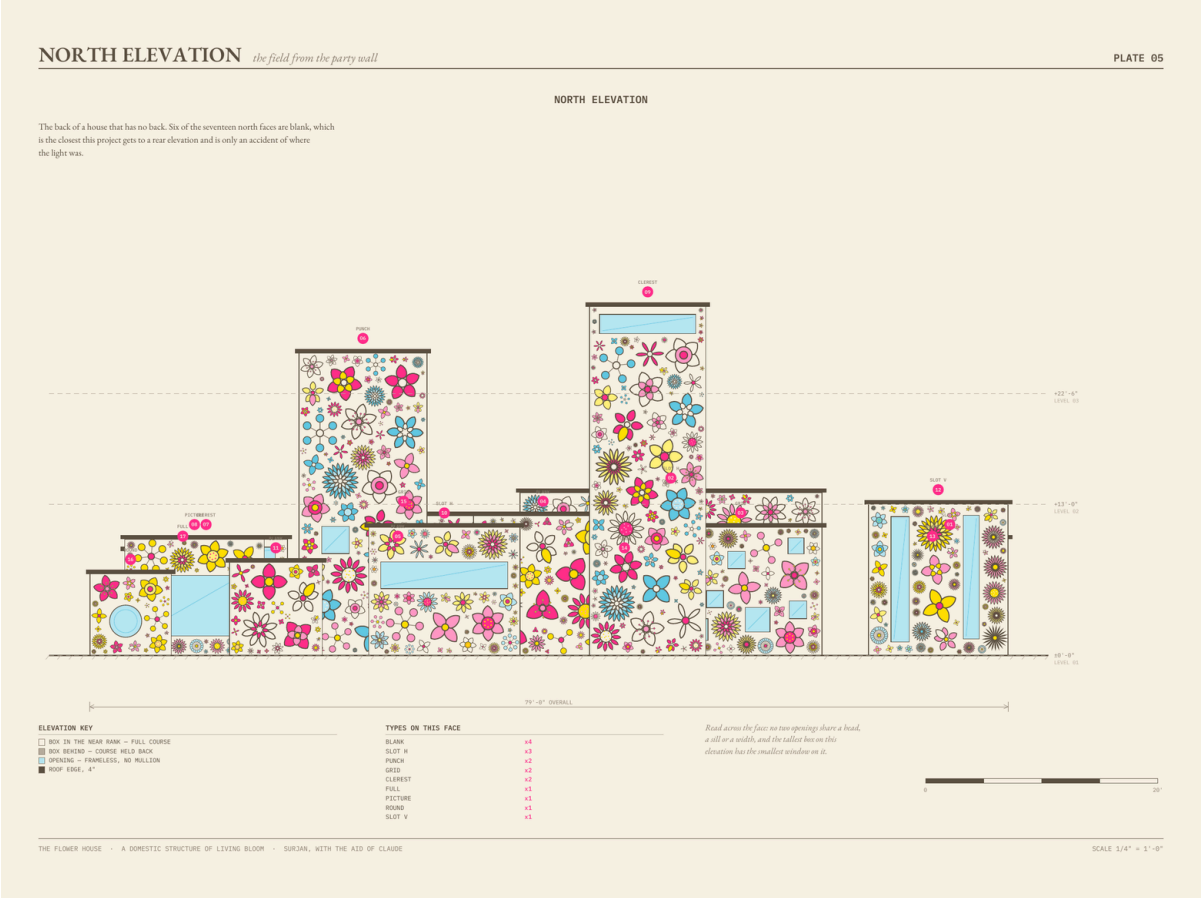

NORTH ELEVATION
the field from the party wall
PLATE 05
NORTH ELEVATION
The back of a house that has no back. Six of the seventeen north faces are blank, which is the closest this project gets to a rear elevation and is only an accident of where the light was.
79'-0" OVERALL
ELEVATION KEY
BOX IN THE NEAR RANK — FULL COURSE
BOX BEHIND — COURSE HELD BACK
OPENING — FRAMELESS, NO MULLION
ROOF EDGE, 4"
TYPES ON THIS FACE
BLANK x4
SLOT H x3
PUNCH x2
GRID x2
CLEREST x2
FULL x1
PICTURE x1
ROUND x1
SLOT V x1
Read across the face: no two openings share a head, a sill or a width, and the tallest box on this elevation has the smallest window on it.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

PLATE 05 · NORTH ELEVATION. Six of the seventeen north faces are blank, which is the closest this project comes to a rear elevation.

Seven thousand five hundred square feet of grass is cut on the twentieth of June, the day before the Great Mowing, and the cuttings are left where they fall.

This is the oldest of the nine observances and the only one whose name describes something that has already happened by the time the crowd arrives. Nobody mows at the Great Mowing. The mowing is on the Saturday and the feast is on the Sunday, and the whole of Broome Street smells of cut grass for a week, and that smell is the actual event and everybody knows it.

It begins at about ten. There is no programme. By eleven there are perhaps five thousand people on Broome and Suffolk and in the two side streets, and about four hundred of them are in the lot itself, which the family opens and stands in and does not manage.

At some point in the early afternoon somebody reads the species. One name for each year the house has stood: this year eleven names, in Latin, from a card, by a boy of about nine who was chosen by the simple method of being pushed forward by his sister. He got four of them badly wrong. Five hundred people listened to a nine-year-old mispronounce Eschscholzia californica and nobody laughed and nobody corrected him and at the end nobody clapped, because you do not clap, and there was a silence of about four seconds which is the loudest thing that happens in this city all year.

And then it breaks up. People walk in the gaps between the boxes, which is the only day they are allowed to. Nobody goes inside. Nobody has ever tried, in eleven years, and I want that recorded, because I have policed events in this city and I know what a crowd of five thousand will do to a rope.

At about four the family goes back into the Long Room and closes the door, which is the signal, and by six there is nobody left but the sweeper.

I have been to eleven. My daughter has been to eleven. In the fourth year I was on duty and had a radio and a high-visibility vest, and a woman asked me whether the flowers were real, and I said yes, and she said, in the tone of someone completing a transaction, good.

BOOK FOUR · THE KEEPERS AND THE KEPT

In which the Register turns, against its own rules, to the people; and records six of them.

XXIX. Adela Quinn

She was born in Ponce and came here at nine, and was a dispatcher for a car service on Ludlow Street for nineteen years, and was let go in the third year of the Register when the company was bought and the dispatch went to a computer.

I have said already what she noticed and how she wrote it down. What I want to record here is what a dispatcher does, because I did not understand it until she explained it to me and it is the whole of why she saw what nobody else saw.

A dispatcher, she said, does not think about cars. A dispatcher thinks about the order of things. You have eleven cars and forty calls and the calls do not arrive in the order they will be served, and the skill — the entire skill, nineteen years of it — is holding in your head a sequence that has not happened yet and noticing immediately when the world departs from it.

So when a red flower appeared on the north face of a kitchen on Broome Street in the last week of May, and the same red flower appeared on the second tier of a building nine tenths of a mile away eleven days later, and then in an alley off Stone Street six weeks after that, a woman who had spent nineteen years noticing the order of things noticed the order of things.

She wrote to the Department in June. The letter was filed. She wrote again in October with a table of nine adoptions over two seasons, on the back of a menu from a place on Essex Street that has since closed, in ballpoint, ruled by hand with a bus ticket.

I filed that one too. I want that in the book. I was thirty-four years old and I filed it, and it sat in a drawer for four months, and the only reason it came out again is that a supervisor asked me for something else and I found it and read it properly on the ninth floor at half past six on a Thursday with the lights already off in half the room.

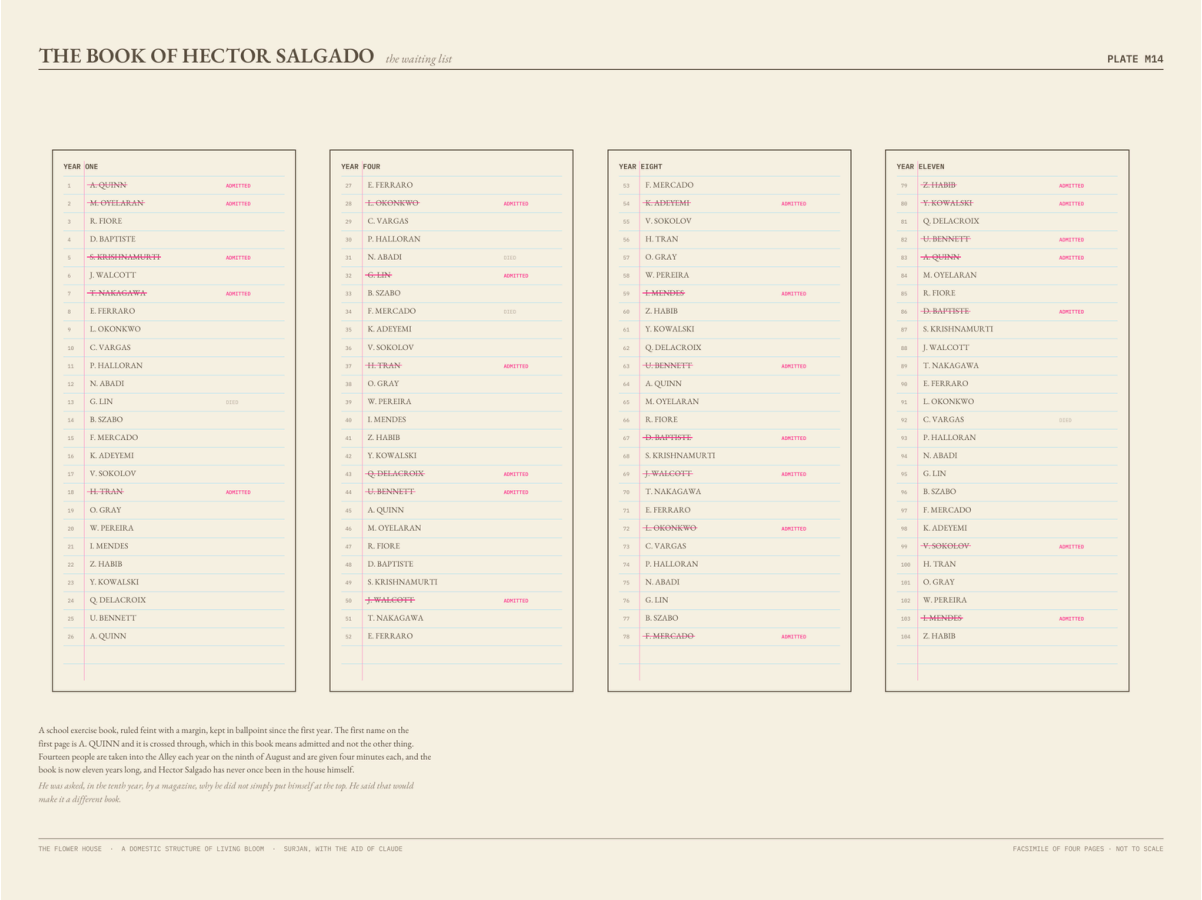
She never worked again after the car service. She would not take anything from us; the Department offered a consultancy in the sixth year and she said no, twice, in a manner I would describe as amused. She was first on Hector Salgado's list and she went into the Alley in the fifth year, on the ninth of August, for four minutes, and would not say afterwards what it had been like.

She died in the ninth year, in November, of something ordinary. The last time I saw her she was standing on Suffolk Street looking at a hundred-foot square of grass and bare lath with her hands in her pockets and she said, without turning round: they're still at it, you know. Underground.

The first document in this Register is a menu. I have never allowed it to be photocopied for the file, because I want the object, and because I am aware that this is not a municipal reason.

XXX. Hector Salgado and the Book

He is sixty-eight and he has never been inside any of the nine houses.



THE BOOK OF HECTOR SALGADO *the waiting list* PLATE M14

YEAR ONE

1	~~A. QUINN~~	ADMITTED
2	~~M. OYELARAN~~	ADMITTED
3	R. FIORE	
4	D. BAPTISTE	
5	~~S. KRISHNAMURTI~~	ADMITTED
6	J. WALCOTT	
7	~~T. NAKAGAWA~~	ADMITTED
8	E. FERRARO	
9	L. OKONKWO	
10	C. VARGAS	
11	P. HALLORAN	
12	N. ABADI	
13	G. LIN	DIED
14	B. SZABO	
15	F. MERCADO	
16	K. ADEYEMI	
17	V. SOKOLOV	
18	~~H. TRAN~~	ADMITTED
19	O. GRAY	
20	W. PEREIRA	
21	I. MENDES	
22	Z. HABIB	
23	Y. KOWALSKI	
24	Q. DELACROIX	
25	U. BENNETT	
26	A. QUINN	

YEAR FOUR

27	E. FERRARO	
28	~~L. OKONKWO~~	ADMITTED
29	C. VARGAS	
30	P. HALLORAN	
31	N. ABADI	DIED
32	~~G. LIN~~	ADMITTED
33	B. SZABO	
34	F. MERCADO	DIED
35	K. ADEYEMI	
36	V. SOKOLOV	
37	~~H. TRAN~~	ADMITTED
38	O. GRAY	
39	W. PEREIRA	
40	I. MENDES	
41	Z. HABIB	
42	Y. KOWALSKI	
43	~~Q. DELACROIX~~	ADMITTED
44	~~U. BENNETT~~	ADMITTED
45	A. QUINN	
46	M. OYELARAN	
47	R. FIORE	
48	D. BAPTISTE	
49	S. KRISHNAMURTI	
50	~~J. WALCOTT~~	ADMITTED
51	T. NAKAGAWA	
52	E. FERRARO	

YEAR EIGHT

53	F. MERCADO	
54	~~K. ADEYEMI~~	ADMITTED
55	V. SOKOLOV	
56	H. TRAN	
57	O. GRAY	
58	W. PEREIRA	
59	~~I. MENDES~~	ADMITTED
60	Z. HABIB	
61	Y. KOWALSKI	
62	Q. DELACROIX	
63	~~U. BENNETT~~	ADMITTED
64	A. QUINN	
65	M. OYELARAN	
66	R. FIORE	
67	~~D. BAPTISTE~~	ADMITTED
68	S. KRISHNAMURTI	
69	~~J. WALCOTT~~	ADMITTED
70	T. NAKAGAWA	
71	E. FERRARO	
72	~~L. OKONKWO~~	ADMITTED
73	C. VARGAS	
74	P. HALLORAN	
75	N. ABADI	
76	G. LIN	
77	B. SZABO	
78	~~F. MERCADO~~	ADMITTED

YEAR ELEVEN

79	~~Z. HABIB~~	ADMITTED
80	~~Y. KOWALSKI~~	ADMITTED
81	Q. DELACROIX	
82	~~U. BENNETT~~	ADMITTED
83	~~A. QUINN~~	ADMITTED
84	M. OYELARAN	
85	R. FIORE	
86	~~D. BAPTISTE~~	ADMITTED
87	S. KRISHNAMURTI	
88	J. WALCOTT	
89	T. NAKAGAWA	
90	E. FERRARO	
91	L. OKONKWO	
92	C. VARGAS	DIED
93	P. HALLORAN	
94	N. ABADI	
95	G. LIN	
96	B. SZABO	
97	F. MERCADO	
98	K. ADEYEMI	
99	~~V. SOKOLOV~~	ADMITTED
100	H. TRAN	
101	O. GRAY	
102	W. PEREIRA	
103	~~I. MENDES~~	ADMITTED
104	Z. HABIB	

A school exercise book, ruled feint with a margin, kept in ballpoint since the first year. The first name on the first page is A. QUINN and it is crossed through, which in this book means admitted and not the other thing. Fourteen people are taken into the Alley each year on the ninth of August and are given four minutes each, and the book is now eleven years long, and Hector Salgado has never once been in the house himself.

He was asked, in the tenth year, by a magazine, why he did not simply put himself at the top. He said that would make it a different book.

THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE FACSIMILE OF FOUR PAGES · NOT TO SCALE

PLATE M14 · THE BOOK OF HECTOR SALGADO. A school exercise book, ruled feint with a margin, kept in ballpoint since the first year.

The Night of the Narrow admits fourteen people. Four minutes each. It began in the first year with about twenty people standing at the mouth of an alley off Stone Street on a hot evening in August,

and the owner — a woman who worked in insurance and who was, I think, simply embarrassed by the crowd — came out and said that four of them could come in for a minute.

Somebody had to decide which four. Hector was there because he lived on Water Street and had come to see what everyone was looking at, and he had a pen, and he wrote down four names, and then he wrote down everyone else's names underneath, and said: next year.

That is the entire origin of the most oversubscribed thing in this city.

The book is a school exercise book, ruled feint with a margin. There are now eleven years of names in it and about four hundred are crossed through, which in his book means admitted, and about sixty have a different mark against them, which means died before their turn. He rules the pages with a bus ticket, which he learned from Adela Quinn, whose name is the first name on the first page.

In the tenth year a magazine asked him why he did not simply put himself at the top. He said that would make it a different book.

The Department has three times offered to take the list over and administer it properly, with a ballot and a website, and he has three times said no, and on the third occasion he brought the book to Chambers Street and put it on my desk and let me hold it and then took it back.

I am the Keeper of a register with forty-three fields and a validated form and an archive with a fire rating, and I have held in my hands, for perhaps ninety seconds, the only document in this project that anybody would run into a burning building for.

XXXI. The Bloom Watch

Four hundred and something people with an email list.

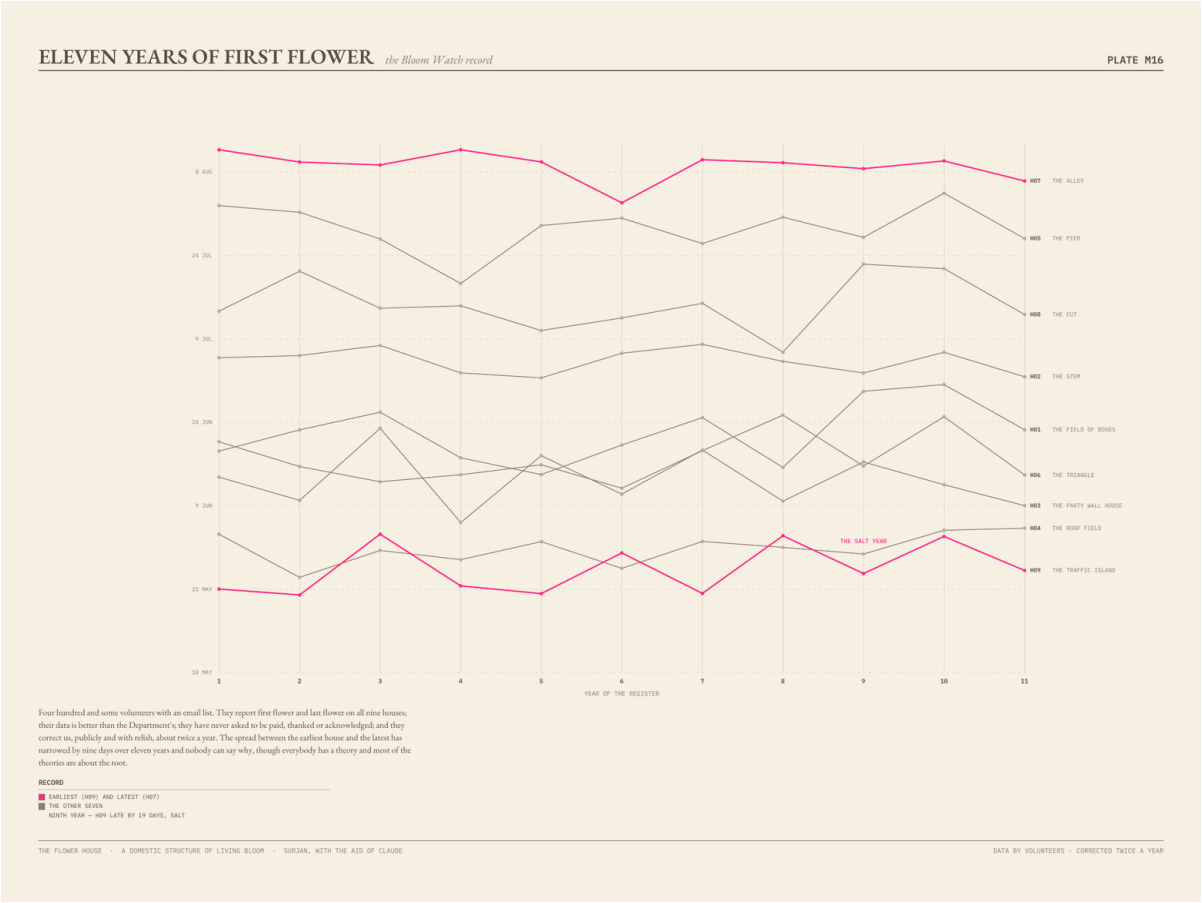

ELEVEN YEARS OF FIRST FLOWER
the Bloom Watch record
PLATE M16
8 AUG
24 JUL
9 JUL
24 JUN
9 JUN
25 MAY
10 MAY
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
YEAR OF THE REGISTER
H07 THE ALLEY
H05 THE PIER
H08 THE CUT
H02 THE STEM
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES
H06 THE TRIANGLE
H03 THE PARTY WALL HOUSE
H04 THE ROOF FIELD
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
THE SALT YEAR
Four hundred and some volunteers with an email list. They report first flower and last flower on all nine houses; their data is better than the Department's; they have never asked to be paid, thanked or acknowledged; and they correct us, publicly and with relish, about twice a year. The spread between the earliest house and the latest has narrowed by nine days over eleven years and nobody can say why, though everybody has a theory and most of the theories are about the root.
RECORD
EARLIEST (H09) AND LATEST (H07)
THE OTHER SEVEN
NINTH YEAR — H09 LATE BY 19 DAYS, SALT
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DATA BY VOLUNTEERS · CORRECTED TWICE A YEAR

PLATE M16 · ELEVEN YEARS OF FIRST FLOWER. Their data is better than ours.

They report first flower and last flower on all nine houses. They have a standard: a species is in flower when three separate observers have it on three separate days, and they do not accept photographs from more than forty feet, and they will not take a report from an owner because owners are, in their phrase, compromised.

Nobody organises them. There is a woman in Washington Heights who keeps the spreadsheet and a man in Sunset Park who does the arithmetic and neither of them has ever met the other. They have never asked to be paid, thanked, funded, acknowledged or consulted. They correct the Department publicly, in writing, about twice a year, and they are right about twice a year.

In the eighth year they discovered, before we did, that the spread between the earliest house and the latest was narrowing. Nine days over eleven years. Everybody has a theory and most of the theories are about the root, and the woman at the Botanical Garden thinks it is simply the climate and has said so in a manner that has cost her two friendships within the Watch.

What I want to set down about the Bloom Watch is not the data, which is in the plates. It is this. In the fifth year we asked them, formally, on headed paper, for their observations for the

previous season. They sent them by return, complete, with methodology, at no charge. And at the bottom of the covering letter, in a postscript, somebody had written: we would have sent them anyway. You only had to look.

Four hundred people in a city of nine million, doing arithmetic about flowers in their own time, on their own equipment, for eleven years, for nothing.

I have run out of ways to describe what that is and I have started, in my own head, simply calling it the city.

XXXII. The Man in the Alley

Six of the nine houses are unoccupied for the eleven weeks. Three are not. Of the three, one is the Alley, in which a man of seventy-three lives alone in eight boxes in single file down a service alley fourteen feet wide, and has done for nine years, and describes the winter as the best months.

He is a retired stage electrician. He worked houses on Forty-Fourth Street for thirty-one years and then a season on a cruise ship, which he does not discuss. He bought the alley — it was an alley, with a title, which is a thing that exists in the oldest part of this island — in the fourth year with everything he had, and had it built, and I have the file.

In the eleven weeks his house is eight lath frames and eleven panes of glass and a rooflight in each box, and the sky arrives as a long grey strip eleven degrees across, and he says he can hear the harbour.

I asked him, in the eighth year, on a February inspection, whether he did not find it bleak. He was making tea in the third box, which is the kitchen, and he had a coat on indoors, and he thought about it properly for some time, which I have learned to expect from him, and then he said:

In the theatre you strike the set at the end of the run. You do not put a cover over it. You take it apart and you stack the flats and you sweep the deck and then you stand in the empty house with the works light on, and that is the best hour of the whole job, and nobody has ever been able to tell me why.

He gets the works light in February and the show in August. He will not go anywhere in the eleven weeks and has turned down two invitations from his daughter in Providence.

He has never once come out for the Night of the Narrow. He admits the fourteen, four minutes each, and stands in the mouth of the alley, and lets Hector run it, and goes back inside when it is done.

XXXIII. The Six Who Leave

The other six households leave.

Two go to relatives. One takes a sublet on Ninth Avenue every year from the second week of December to the last week of February, from the same landlord, at the same rent, and has done seven times. The Pier is simply shut and the keys are given to the Department, which is me, and I have the Pier keys in a drawer at Chambers Street from December to March and I have never once used them.

I want to describe what the leaving is like, because it is not a defeat and it is not treated as one.

They go in the second week of December over about four days, and it is entirely public. The families carry things out into the street and stand about and the neighbours come out. At Broome Street it has become, without anybody arranging it, a sort of small unofficial event: perhaps two hundred people on the pavement on a Saturday morning watching a family put boxes into a van, and applauding, mildly, when the last one goes in.

And in the first week of March they come back. Every year. All six. Eleven times out of eleven, and I have the forms, because Field 28 asks whether the structure is occupied in winter and Field 28 has a note field and I put the return date in it.

In the seventh year the Department, in a fit of helpfulness, prepared a scheme to insulate three of the houses so that the families could remain. Nobody had asked for it. It was costed and drawn and it would have worked and it would have added an inch and three-quarters to the wall.

The consultation drew eleven hundred letters of objection. Forty were from the immediate blocks. The rest were from a city that does not live in these buildings, has never been inside them, and would not permit a stranger to make them comfortable.

I wrote the report that killed it. It is four pages long and its conclusion is one sentence: the structures perform as designed.

XXXIV. My Daughter

She is fourteen and thinks the whole thing is embarrassing, which is correct, and she comes every year.

I have taken her to the Great Mowing at Broome Street since she was three. For the first six years she thought it was mine — that I had made it, that the Department made buildings rather than inspecting them — and I did not correct her as quickly as I should have. When she was nine she worked it out and was properly angry with me for about a week, which I deserved.

At eleven she went through a period of preferring the Traffic Island, on the grounds that it was in the road and therefore, she said, braver.

At twelve she asked me why the houses talk to each other and I gave her the honest answer, which is that I do not know, and she said that was a stupid answer for someone whose whole job it was.

At thirteen she stopped coming to the mowing and came instead, alone, on the twenty-second, the day after, which she did not tell me about and which I found out from the sweeper.

This year she asked whether she could read the January page. Not the tea towel; the actual page, in the file, in the archive on the ninth floor with the fire rating. I brought her in on a Saturday and signed her in as a visitor and gave her the folder and she read thirteen messages in fifty-nine days and put it down and said nothing for a while.

Then she said: the Alley one isn't a message.

And I said: it's recorded as one. There's a field for it.

And she said: I know, but it isn't. It's just you writing down that nobody said anything.

She is fourteen and she is right, and I have been keeping this Register for eleven years and I had not put it to myself in those words, and I have thought about very little else since.

BOOK FIVE · WHAT THE CITY SAYS

In which nine accounts are collected as they were told, and none of them is verified, and the Register declines to say which it believes.

XXXV. Three Accounts of Light

THE NINE ACCOUNTS none of them verified
PLATE M20
i THE LAMP
That a lamp left burning in the Stem will be answered, within a week, by a lamp in the Alley, which has no electricity.
ii THE NAMES
That a child who learns all two hundred and sixty-four names before the age of twelve will be told a two hundred and sixty-fifth.
iii THE DEBT
That the Field of Boxes owes the Traffic Island something, and knows it, and cannot say so, and that this is why it starts early.
iv THE PIER
That the Pier is not moored and has moved eleven feet north since the fifth year, and that the survey confirms this and the survey is wrong.
v THE FOURTEEN
That of the fourteen admitted to the Alley each August, one is always someone who did not apply.
vi THE ROCK
That the Cut is not speaking to the Party Wall House but through it, and that the recipient is further south and has not been built.
vii THE GLASS
That the empty glass Pavilion at Broome Street is not empty in February and that this is why the family leaves.
viii THE SWEEPER
That the man who sweeps the Broome Street pavement has been three different men and that nobody has noticed.
ix THE TENTH
That the tenth house was built first.
Nine accounts, collected between the fourth year and the eleventh, from bus drivers, schoolteachers, two priests, a hospital porter, the Bloom Watch mailing list, and a man on Pearl Street who would not give his name. The Register records them because they are said, and because a building about which nothing is said is not, in this city, a building anybody keeps.
The ninth account is the only one the Keeper has ever been unable to argue with.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
AS COLLECTED · NOT AS BELIEVED

PLATE M20 · THE NINE ACCOUNTS. As collected, not as believed.

i. THE LAMP. That a lamp left burning overnight in the Stem on East Third Street will be answered, within a week, by a lamp in the Alley off Stone Street, which has no electricity.

The Alley has no supply. This is a matter of record: the connection was never made, the man who lives there declined it, and he lights the eight boxes with oil and with three battery lanterns that he charges at a laundromat on Water Street. So the account, taken literally, is not remarkable — a man lights a lamp; men do.

What is claimed is the ordering. That the lamp in the Alley follows the lamp in the Stem, at a lag of between four and eight days, and only in the eleven weeks, and only when the Stem's lamp has been left burning all night and not merely late. Three people have kept counts. Two of the counts agree.

I have asked him. He said he had not heard of it, and then a week later he telephoned me at Chambers Street, which he has done four times in nine years, and said: I don't leave it on for them. I leave it on for me. And then he said: but I would leave it on for them.

ii. THE NAMES. That a child who learns all two hundred and sixty-four names before the age of twelve will be told a two hundred and sixty-fifth.

There are, as far as the Register can establish, six children in this city who have done it. Four will not discuss it. One says nothing happened. One, a boy in Inwood who was eleven at the time and is now nineteen and works at a hardware store on Broadway, told a schoolteacher, who told the Bloom Watch, who told me, that he had been told a name, and that it was not in Latin, and that it was not a name for a flower but a name for a colour, and that he would not repeat it because it was not his.

I have met him. He is a perfectly ordinary young man who sells paint. When I asked, he was polite and immovable and slightly bored, in the way of someone who has been asked before, and he said: look, I know how it sounds. And I said: I keep the register, I know exactly how it sounds. And he laughed and rang up a customer and that was the end of it.

iii. THE GLASS. That the empty glass Pavilion at Broome Street is not empty in February, and that this is why the family leaves.

The Pavilion is seven feet square and glazed on all four faces and contains nothing and is the place the family go to be alone. In the eleven weeks it is glass and lath and a floor, standing in a hundred-foot square of frozen grass, entirely transparent, lit by the streetlight on Suffolk.

The account holds that something is in it. Nobody says what. The versions I have collected divide roughly in half between those who say it is a person and those who say it is a season.

I have been in that yard in February with a torch on a routine inspection. I have looked at the Pavilion from about forty feet with my clipboard under my arm.

I did not go closer, and I have asked myself for six years why not, and the honest answer is that I did not want to establish anything.

XXXVI. Three Accounts of Movement

iv. THE PIER. That the Pier is not moored, and has moved eleven feet north since the fifth year, and that the survey confirms this and the survey is wrong.

The pier stub is on timber piles driven in 1911 and condemned in 1979 and re-rated in the fourth year. It cannot move. It has been surveyed four times and the surveys, taken together, show a northward drift of eleven feet three inches, which every engineer who has looked at it has attributed to instrument error, benchmark movement, and the fact that the original 1911 datum is a brass plug in a bulkhead that was rebuilt in 1958.

All of that is almost certainly correct. The account persists anyway, and it persists in a specific form which I record because it is the interesting part: that the Pier is not drifting but walking, and that it is going north to the Traffic Island, and that it will take four hundred years.

v. THE SWEEPER. That the man who sweeps the Broome Street pavement, unpaid, has been three different men, and that nobody has noticed.

This one I can partly answer and I am going to, because it is the only account in this chapter that I have actually run down, and because the answer is better than the story.

It has been four men and one woman. The first was a superintendent from the building opposite who did it for two years and then moved to Florida. The second was his nephew. The third and fourth overlap and are, I believe, friends. The woman does the winter, which nobody wants, and has done it for five years and will not give her name to anybody including me.

None of them was asked. Each of them simply started, and each of them, when questioned by an inspector, has given a version of the same answer, which the third man put best: I'm not doing it for the house. People come to see the house. The pavement was a disgrace.

vi. THE FOURTEEN. That of the fourteen admitted to the Alley each August, one is always someone who did not apply.

Hector Salgado denies this. He denies it in a particular way, which is that he says the book is the book and the book has fourteen names in it and the fourteen names go in.

I have attended nine Nights of the Narrow. On four of them I have counted fifteen people go in over the course of the evening. On two of those four I subsequently found that somebody had gone in twice. On the other two I did not find anything.

XXXVII. Three Accounts of the Unbuilt

vii. THE DEBT. That the Field of Boxes owes the Traffic Island something, and knows it, and cannot say so, and that this is why it starts early.

This account is younger than the others; it dates from the ninth year and it is plainly an interpretation of the quarrel rather than a legend. I include it because of how fast it spread. Within about four months of the Register logging the four repeated messages and the reply — not everything is a decision — the story was on the crosstown bus, in a school on 110th Street, and in a wedding speech, of which I have a recording.

What that tells me is not about buildings. It is that this city was waiting with a shape ready. Nine houses that speak, and one of them wrong, and unable to apologise: we knew that story already, all of us, and we put the buildings into it within a season.

viii. THE ROCK. That the Cut is not speaking to the Party Wall House but through it, and that the intended recipient is further south and has not been built yet.

The bedrock channel runs from Inwood to West 129th Street at six weeks a message, and stops. It stops because there is nothing further along it. This is the account's whole claim: that a conduction route does not aim, that the Party Wall House is simply the first thing on the line, and that the Cut has been sending, for eleven years, every winter, to whatever will one day stand at the far end of the schist, which is somewhere in the low Twenties, under a parking garage.

There is a version of this told by children in which the tenth house is already down there, in the rock, waiting, and I have heard a bus driver tell it as though he had heard it from an engineer.

ix. THE TENTH. That the tenth house was built first.

That is the whole account. There is no elaboration; every version I have collected is that single sentence, and the people who tell it do not seem to feel any need to explain it, and become impatient when asked.

I have argued with the other eight accounts in this chapter, in my head and on paper and once, regrettably, in a public meeting.

I have never been able to argue with the ninth.

XXXVIII. A Tenth Account, Told Only Once

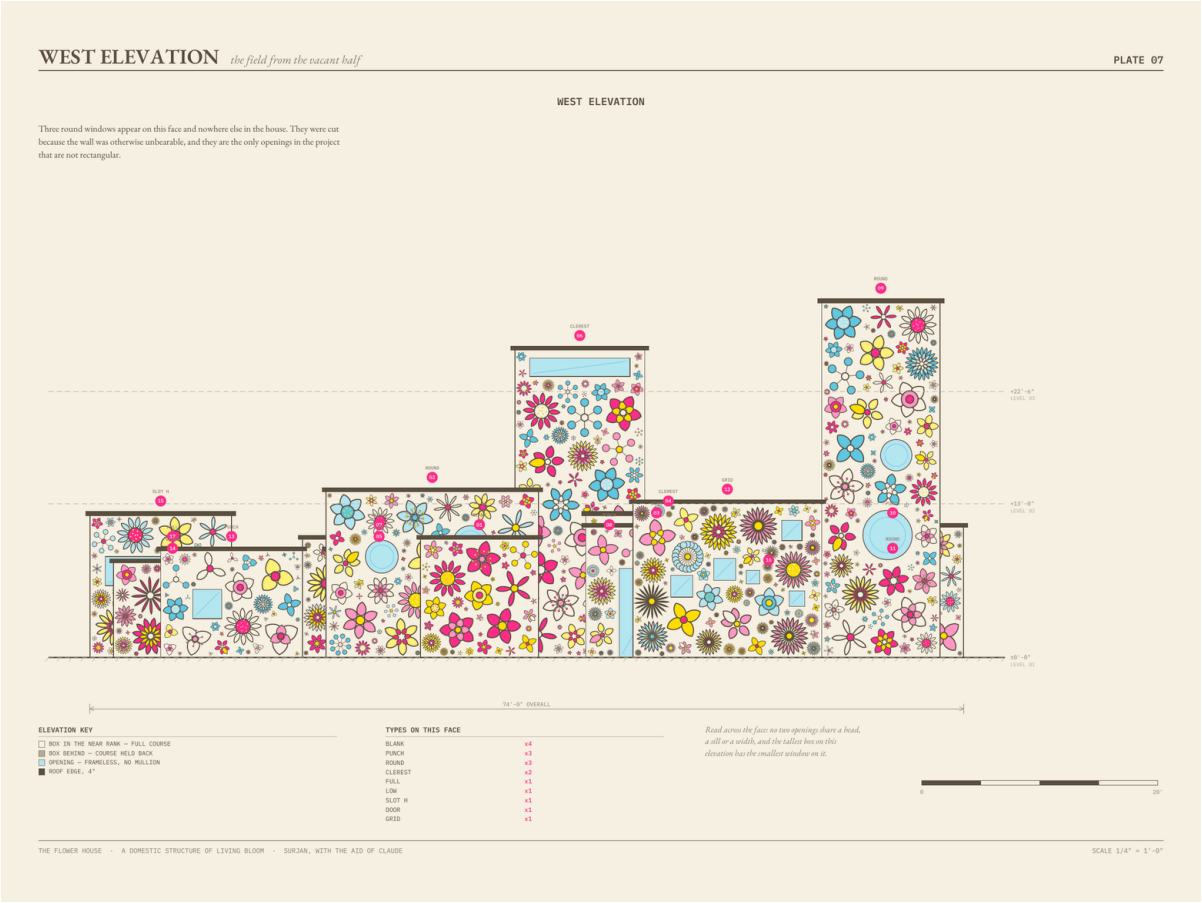

WEST ELEVATION the field from the vacant half
PLATE 07
WEST ELEVATION
Three round windows appear on this face and nowhere else in the house. They were cut because the wall was otherwise unbearable, and they are the only openings in the project that are not rectangular.
74'-0" OVERALL
ELEVATION KEY
BOX IN THE NEAR RANK — FULL COURSE
BOX BEHIND — COURSE HELD BACK
OPENING — FRAMELESS, NO MULLION
ROOF EDGE, 4"
TYPES ON THIS FACE
BLANK x4
PUNCH x3
ROUND x3
CLEREST x2
FULL x1
LOW x1
SLOT H x1
DOOR x1
GRID x1
Read across the face: no two openings share a head, a sill or a width, and the tallest box on this elevation has the smallest window on it.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

PLATE 07 · WEST ELEVATION, SITE 01. The round windows were cut because the wall was otherwise unbearable.

In the tenth year, in March, a woman came to the counter on the ninth floor of the building on Chambers Street and asked for the Keeper by name, which almost nobody does, and I came out.

She was perhaps sixty. She had a coat over her arm although it was cold. She said she had something to report and that she did not want it written down, and I said that everything reported at that counter is written down, and she said then she would not report it, and turned to go, and then did not go.

What she told me, standing up, at the counter, in about four minutes, was this.

Her husband had died in January of that year, at home, on Suffolk Street, four floors up and across from the Field of Boxes, in a room whose window looks into the lot. It had been a long illness and she had been with him. She said that on the last night, which was the eleventh of January, she had been at the window at about three in the morning because she could not be in the chair any longer, and that the lot was bare — lath and glass and frozen grass and the streetlight on Suffolk — and that in the empty glass Pavilion, which is seven feet square and contains nothing, there had been a light.

Not a lamp, she said. Not a reflection. She was very precise about this and she had clearly been over it many times. A light the colour of the inside of a flower, low down, about the height of a chair.

She said it was there for as long as she watched it, which she thought was about twenty minutes, and that she had not woken anybody and had not gone down, and that her husband died at about six.

And then she said the thing that I have not been able to put anywhere, which is that she was not frightened and did not think it was him and did not want me to think that she thought it was him. She said: it was just that something was up. Somebody was up with me.

I said I was sorry for her loss. She said thank you and put her coat on properly and went to the lift, and at the lift she turned round and said: don't write it down. And I said I would not.

I have not. It is not in the file. It is not in Field 41 or Field 42 or Field 43. There is no form on the ninth floor with any of that on it, and there never will be while I hold the post.

It is in this book, without her name, without the date beyond the month, and with her permission, which I went and asked for in the eleventh year, in August, at her door, with my hat in my hands like a man in a play.

She said: you can put it in a book. A book isn't the same thing.

She is right and I have thought a great deal about why, and the best I can manage is this. A register is a claim that something is so. A book is only a claim that something was said. I have spent eleven years and forty-three fields establishing what is so about nine buildings, and the one thing anybody has ever told me that I would not part with is a thing I am not permitted to establish at all.

BOOK SIX · THE CHILDREN

In which eight houses arrive that nobody commissioned, and a ninth is described that has not arrived at all.

XXXIX. The First Seedling

In the sixth year, in the season after the Field of Boxes and the Pier had been in full flower at once and in sight of one another across a mile and two-fifths of the West Side, four small volumes came up on a piece of ground under the High Line viaduct at West Twentieth Street.

I use the phrase came up because it is the only accurate one available and because I have been arguing about it with two supervisors for five years.

There was no application. There was no client. There was no architect, no drawing, no permit, no scaffold licence and no builder. There was a strip of ground under a viaduct which had held a car and some pallets, and then over one spring there was a lath frame in four rectangles, growing, the way a hedge grows, at the rate a hedge grows, and by June it carried a course of two hundred and eleven species, of which every single one is on the schedule of either the Field of Boxes or the Pier, in a ratio of about three to two.

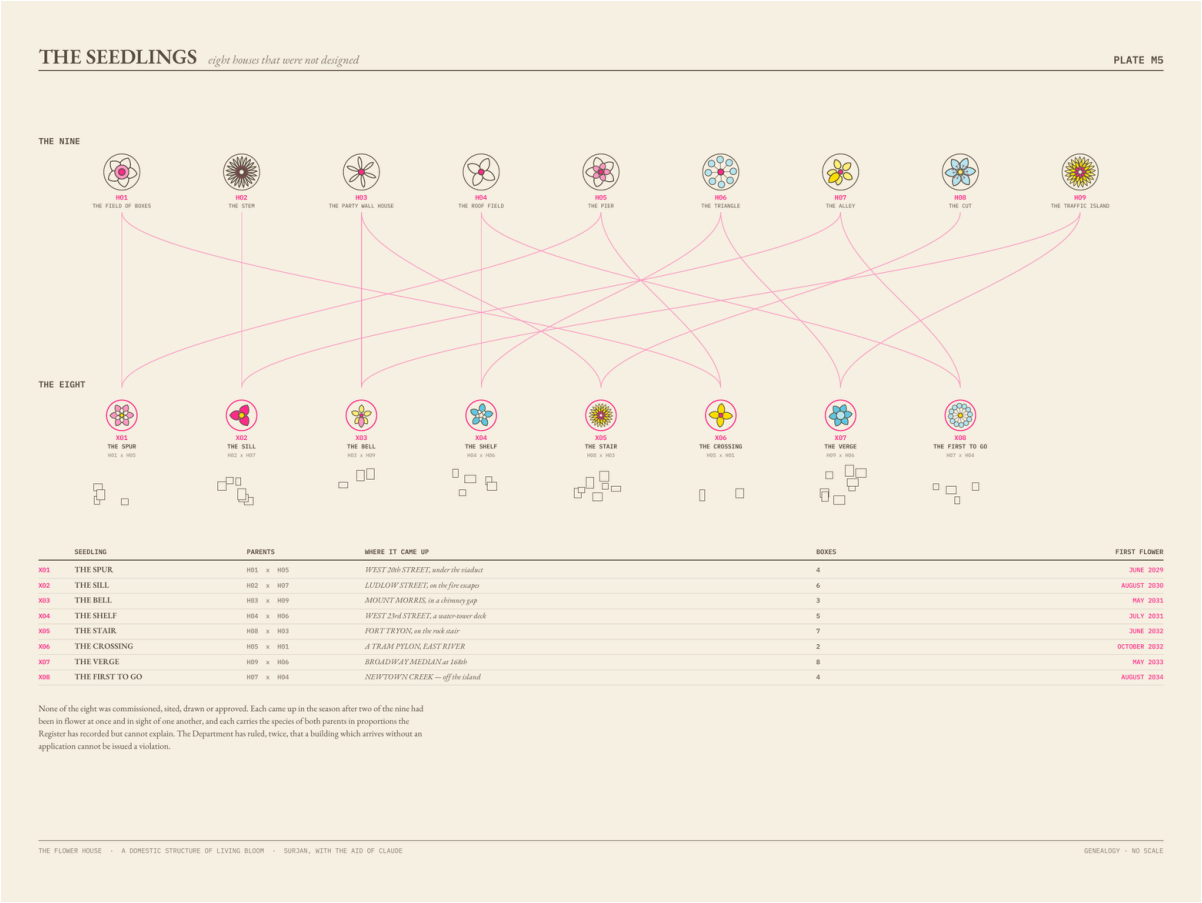

THE SEEDLINGS eight houses that were not designed
PLATE M5
THE NINE
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES
H02 THE STEM
H03 THE PARTY WALL HOUSE
H04 THE ROOF FIELD
H05 THE PIER
H06 THE TRIANGLE
H07 THE ALLEY
H08 THE CUT
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND
THE EIGHT
X01 THE SPUR H01 x H05
X02 THE SILL H02 x H07
X03 THE BELL H03 x H09
X04 THE SHELF H04 x H06
X05 THE STAIR H08 x H03
X06 THE CROSSING H05 x H01
X07 THE VERGE H09 x H06
X08 THE FIRST TO GO H07 x H04
SEEDLING PARENTS WHERE IT CAME UP BOXES FIRST FLOWER
X01 THE SPUR H01 x H05 WEST 20th STREET, under the viaduct 4 JUNE 2029
X02 THE SILL H02 x H07 LUDLOW STREET, on the fire escapes 6 AUGUST 2030
X03 THE BELL H03 x H09 MOUNT MORRIS, in a chimney gap 3 MAY 2031
X04 THE SHELF H04 x H06 WEST 23rd STREET, a water-tower deck 5 JULY 2031
X05 THE STAIR H08 x H03 FORT TRYON, on the rock stair 7 JUNE 2032
X06 THE CROSSING H05 x H01 A TRAM PYLON, EAST RIVER 2 OCTOBER 2032
X07 THE VERGE H09 x H06 BROADWAY MEDIAN, at 168th 8 MAY 2033
X08 THE FIRST TO GO H07 x H04 NEWTOWN CREEK — off the island 4 AUGUST 2034
None of the eight was commissioned, sited, drawn or approved. Each came up in the season after two of the nine had been in flower at once and in sight of one another, and each carries the species of both parents in proportions the Register has recorded but cannot explain. The Department has ruled, twice, that a building which arrives without an application cannot be issued a violation.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
GENEALOGY · NO SCALE

PLATE M5 · THE SEEDLINGS. None of the eight was commissioned, sited, drawn or approved.

It is fourteen feet by nine at the largest volume and eight feet high. It has one round window. It has a door, and the door is on the north face, and the door faces the viaduct column, which is a mistake no architect would make and which the Spur has made and kept for six years.

The Department's legal counsel ruled, twice, that a building which arrives without an application cannot be issued a violation, because a violation must be served on a person. There is no person. There is a house that put itself up between two parents that had never met and had only, for four months, been able to see each other.

I do not want to be understood as claiming that these buildings reproduce. I am a clerk of a municipal department and I will say only what the forms say. The forms say: seedling, first observed, species composition, parentage inferred from schedule overlap, date of first flower. There are eight such forms. They are all filled out in the same hand.

XL. A Register of the Eight

The Spur, under the viaduct at West Twentieth: four boxes, Field of Boxes by Pier, first flower June of the eleventh year hence by the Bloom Watch's projection, though it has flowered every year since the sixth.

The Sill, on the fire escapes of a building on Ludlow Street: six boxes, the smallest of them three feet by four, cantilevered off ironwork that was condemned in 1988. Stem by Alley. The Department has closed the building's escapes and rerouted them and the Sill is now, in the view of counsel, a permanent obstruction with no owner.

The Bell, in a chimney gap at Mount Morris: three boxes, Party Wall House by Traffic Island. It is nine feet across at its widest and forty feet up and can be seen from one bench in the park and from nowhere else.

The Shelf, on a water-tower deck on West Twenty-Third: five boxes, Roof Field by Triangle. Nobody has ever been inside it. Nobody knows whether it is possible to be inside it.

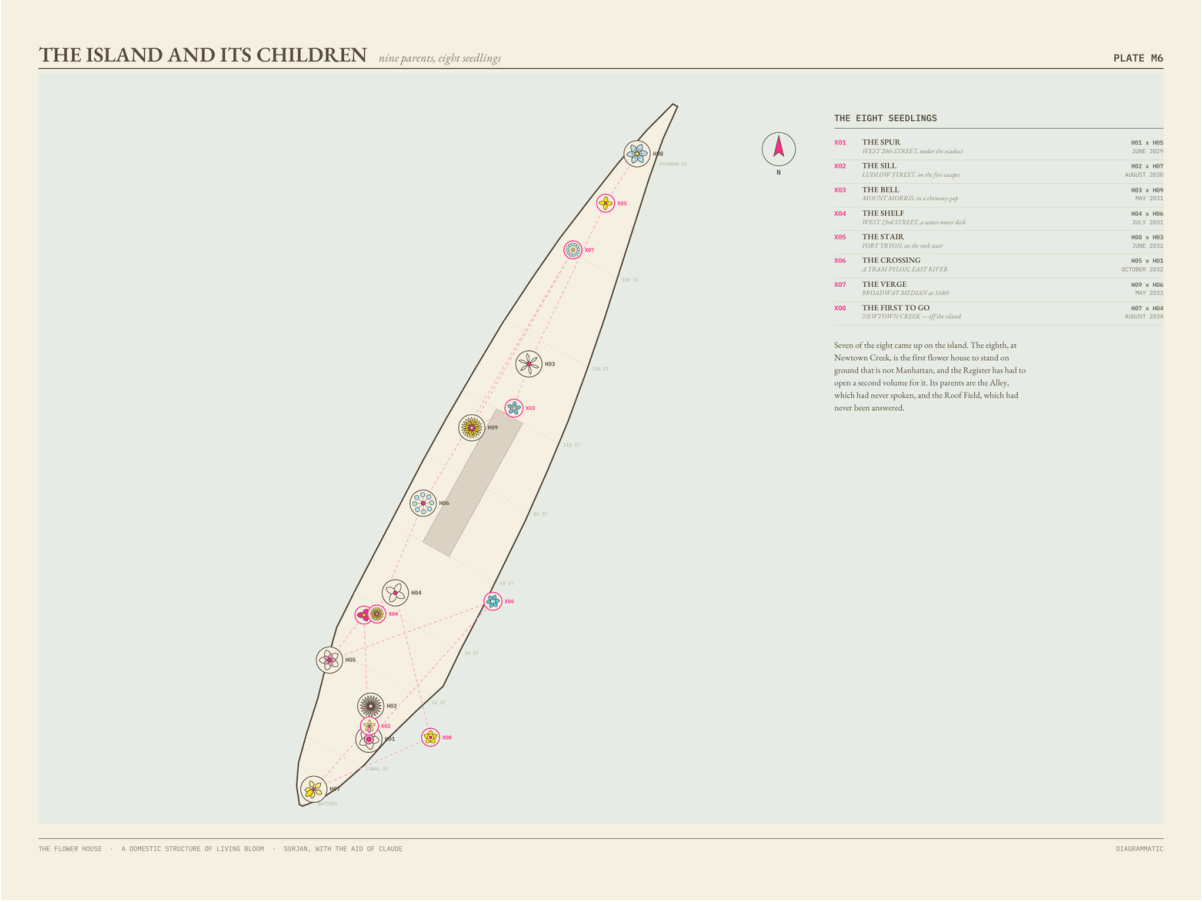

THE ISLAND AND ITS CHILDREN
nine parents, eight seedlings
PLATE M6
N
THE EIGHT SEEDLINGS
X01 THE SPUR
WEST 20th STREET, under the viaduct
H01 × H05
JUNE 2029
X02 THE SILL
LUDLOW STREET, on the fire escape
H02 × H07
AUGUST 2030
X03 THE BELL
MOUNT MORRIS, in a chimney gap
H03 × H09
MAY 2031
X04 THE SHELF
WEST 23rd STREET, a water-tower deck
H04 × H06
JULY 2031
X05 THE STAIR
FORT TRYON, on the rock stair
H08 × H03
JUNE 2032
X06 THE CROSSING
A TRAM PYLON, EAST RIVER
H05 × H01
OCTOBER 2032
X07 THE VERGE
BROADWAY MEDIAN at 168th
H09 × H06
MAY 2033
X08 THE FIRST TO GO
NEWTOWN CREEK — off the island
H07 × H04
AUGUST 2034
Seven of the eight came up on the island. The eighth, at Newtown Creek, is the first flower house to stand on ground that is not Manhattan, and the Register has had to open a second volume for it. Its parents are the Alley, which had never spoken, and the Roof Field, which had never been answered.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DIAGRAMMATIC

PLATE M6 · THE ISLAND AND ITS CHILDREN. Seven of the eight came up on the island.

The Stair, on the rock stair at Fort Tryon: seven boxes on seven steps, Cut by Party Wall House, and the only seedling that anybody can walk through, which they do, at the rate of about nine hundred a day in July, without paying and without asking.

The Crossing, on a tram pylon over the East River: two boxes, Pier by Field of Boxes. It is the highest of everything in this Register and the least visited and the most photographed, from the tram, four hundred times an hour.

The Verge, on the Broadway median at 168th Street: eight boxes, Traffic Island by Triangle. It is the largest of the seedlings and the most like its parents and, I think, the dullest, and I record that judgement knowing I have no standing to make it.

And the eighth.

XLI. The One That Left the Island

At Newtown Creek, on a piece of ground that is in the borough of Queens, four boxes came up in the summer of the fourteenth year, and their species composition is fifty-one per cent from the schedule of the Alley and forty-nine from the schedule of the Roof Field.

I have said in an earlier chapter that the Alley and the Roof Field have stood a mile and three-quarters apart for years with no attested channel between them, and that they simply do not speak. I have said that the Alley receives on four channels and originates on none. I have said that the Roof Field originates the earliest message of every year and, being invisible from the street, is the least answered.

Two houses that had never once been recorded as saying anything to each other made a house.

It is called, in the Register, The First To Go, which is not a name anybody chose and is simply what was written in the field on the day and has stuck. It stands on made ground beside a creek that was for a century one of the most poisoned waterways on this continent, and it carries two hundred and forty of the two hundred and sixty-four species, and it is the first flower house standing on soil that is not Manhattan.

I had to open a second volume of the Register for it. The Department has a form for jurisdiction and I filled it out and it went to a hearing and the hearing has not concluded and will not conclude in my time.

What I want to record here is not the jurisdiction. It is that when the news went out — and it went by every mode at once, which is what a child does — the two parents did not acknowledge

each other. There is no channel. There is still no channel. In the eleven years since, the Alley has originated nothing and the Roof Field has said, every February, up here it is already happening, and neither has referred to Newtown Creek, and both of them, every summer, carry three species they did not carry before and did not get from anyone else.

XLII. The Tenth House

The nine are building something between them.

I am aware of how that sentence reads. I have rewritten it eleven times and it reads the same way each time and I have decided that this is because it is what is happening.

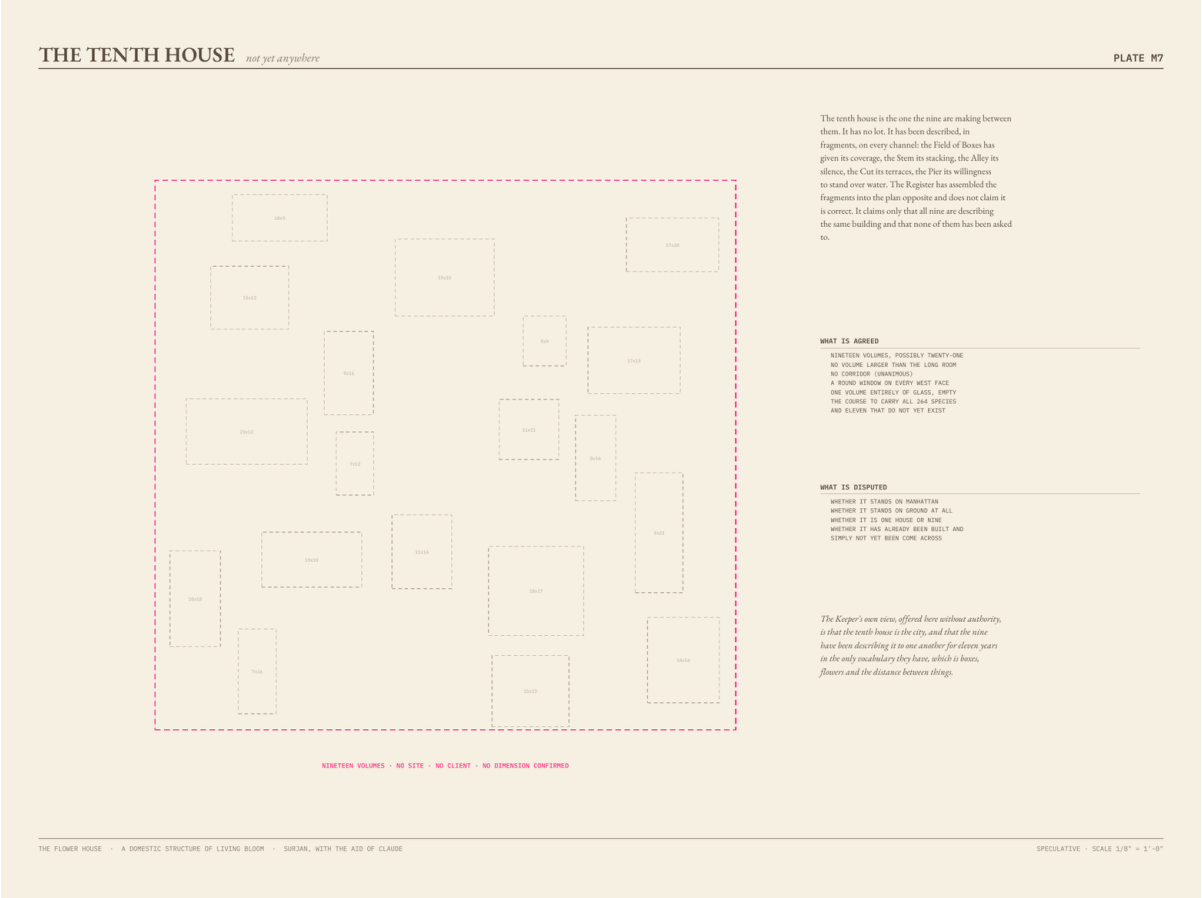

THE TENTH HOUSE not yet anywhere
PLATE M7
The tenth house is the one the nine are making between them. It has no lot. It has been described, in fragments, on every channel: the Field of Boxes has given its coverage, the Stem its stacking, the Alley its silence, the Cut its terraces, the Pier its willingness to stand over water. The Register has assembled the fragments into the plan opposite and does not claim it is correct. It claims only that all nine are describing the same building and that none of them has been asked to.
WHAT IS AGREED
NINETEEN VOLUMES, POSSIBLY TWENTY-ONE
NO VOLUME LARGER THAN THE LONG ROOM
NO CORRIDOR (UNANIMOUS)
A ROUND WINDOW ON EVERY WEST FACE
ONE VOLUME ENTIRELY OF GLASS, EMPTY
THE COURSE TO CARRY ALL 264 SPECIES
AND ELEVEN THAT DO NOT YET EXIST
WHAT IS DISPUTED
WHETHER IT STANDS ON MANHATTAN
WHETHER IT STANDS ON GROUND AT ALL
WHETHER IT IS ONE HOUSE OR NINE
WHETHER IT HAS ALREADY BEEN BUILT AND SIMPLY NOT YET BEEN COME ACROSS
The Keeper's own view, offered here without authority, is that the tenth house is the city, and that the nine have been describing it to one another for eleven years in the only vocabulary they have, which is boxes, flowers and the distance between things.
NINETEEN VOLUMES · NO SITE · NO CLIENT · NO DIMENSION CONFIRMED
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SPECULATIVE · SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

PLATE M7 · THE TENTH HOUSE. Nineteen volumes. No site. No client. No dimension confirmed.

Over eleven years the Register has accumulated, on every channel, a large number of messages which are not weather, not injury, not species, not children, and which do not fit any field on the

form. They are fragments of a description. They arrive in every season, from all nine, and they are all describing the same building.

The Field of Boxes has given its coverage: not more than a quarter of the ground. The Stem has given the stacking, and the three feet of air at every level. The Party Wall House has given the half inch. The Roof Field has given the setback and the invisibility. The Pier has given the willingness to stand over water. The Triangle has given the wedge and the last box the size of a bed. The Alley has given the silence, and the strip of sky eleven degrees across. The Cut has given the terraces and the refusal to level anything. The Traffic Island has given the refusal of a blank wall.

What is agreed among all nine: nineteen volumes, possibly twenty-one. No volume larger than the Long Room. No corridor — this is unanimous and has been unanimous from the first year. A round window on every west face. One volume entirely of glass, containing nothing. And a course carrying all two hundred and sixty-four species, and eleven more that do not yet exist.

What is disputed: whether it stands on Manhattan. Whether it stands on ground at all. Whether it is one house or nine. And whether it has already been built and simply not yet been come across.

I have assembled the fragments into the plan on the facing plate. I do not claim that it is correct. I claim only that all nine of them are describing the same building, that none of them has been asked to, and that they have been at it for eleven years without a break except in the eleven weeks, when they are silent, and during which the description does not advance and does not go backwards either.

My own view, which I offer here without any authority whatsoever and against the advice of my supervisor, is that the tenth house is the city.

I think they are describing New York to each other. I think they have the vocabulary for exactly three things — boxes, flowers, and the distance between things — and that with those three they have been assembling, patiently, at eleven days a message and six weeks a message and ninety seconds a message, an account of the place they are standing in. I think the nineteen volumes are boroughs and blocks and rooms and lots all at once, because to a building those are the same category. I think the volume of glass containing nothing is the harbour. I think the eleven species that do not yet exist are the people who have not been born here yet.

And I think that when I put it that way it stops being a municipal record and starts being something I have no business writing, which is why it is the last chapter and not the first.

XLIII. The Second Volume

Volume I of this Register covers the island of Manhattan and was opened in the second year with four structures in it.

Volume II was opened in the fourteenth year for a single entry, at Newtown Creek, in the borough of Queens, and it is a slim book with one form in it and a great deal of blank paper, and it sits on the shelf next to a volume four inches thick, and the sight of the two of them together is the only joke the archive contains.

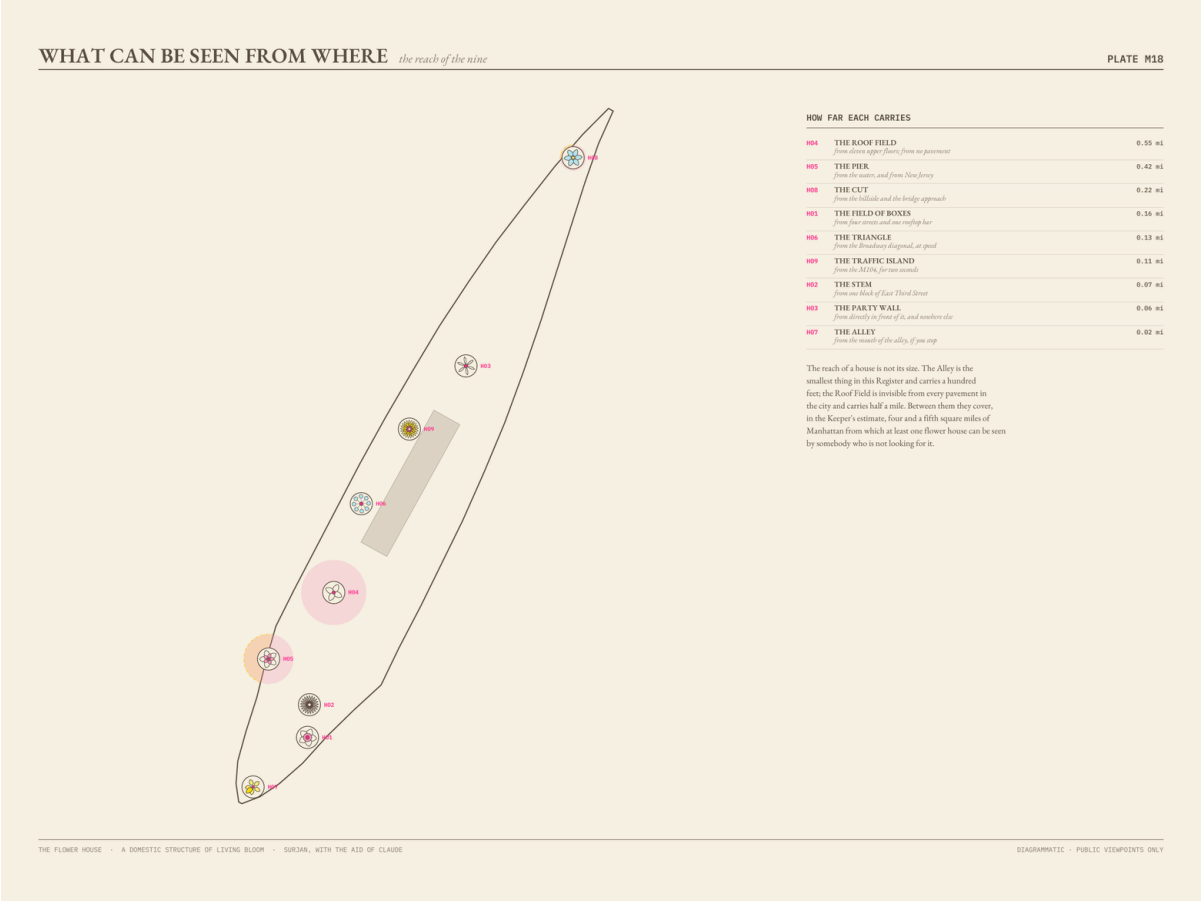

WHAT CAN BE SEEN FROM WHERE
the reach of the nine
PLATE M18
HOW FAR EACH CARRIES
H04 THE ROOF FIELD 0.55 mi
from eleven upper floors; from no pavement
H05 THE PIER 0.42 mi
from the water, and from New Jersey
H08 THE CUT 0.22 mi
from the hillside and the bridge approach
H01 THE FIELD OF BOXES 0.16 mi
from four streets and one rooftop bar
H06 THE TRIANGLE 0.13 mi
from the Broadway diagonal, at speed
H09 THE TRAFFIC ISLAND 0.11 mi
from the M104, for two seconds
H02 THE STEM 0.07 mi
from one block of East Third Street
H03 THE PARTY WALL 0.06 mi
from directly in front of it, and nowhere else
H07 THE ALLEY 0.02 mi
from the mouth of the alley, if you stop
The reach of a house is not its size. The Alley is the smallest thing in this Register and carries a hundred feet; the Roof Field is invisible from every pavement in the city and carries half a mile. Between them they cover, in the Keeper's estimate, four and a fifth square miles of Manhattan from which at least one flower house can be seen by somebody who is not looking for it.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DIAGRAMMATIC · PUBLIC VIEWPOINTS ONLY

PLATE M18 · WHAT CAN BE SEEN FROM WHERE. Between them the nine cover four and a fifth square miles from which at least one flower house can be seen by somebody who is not looking for it.

The jurisdictional question has been at a hearing for four years and will not conclude in my time. The position of counsel is that the Register is constituted for structures within the five boroughs and that Queens is within the five boroughs, and the position of the Department is that the

Register was constituted for a class of structure that was not anticipated to move, and the position of the seedling at Newtown Creek is that it does not participate in hearings.

What concerns me is not the jurisdiction. It is the shelf.

A register is a claim about a boundary. It says: these things, and not those. For eleven years mine has said: this island. And in the fourteenth year a house came up on made ground beside a creek that was for a century one of the most poisoned waterways on this continent, carrying two hundred and forty of the two hundred and sixty-four species, and I had to go to the stationery cupboard on the ninth floor and take out a new ledger and write Volume II on the spine with a marker.

I did it on a Tuesday afternoon and it took ninety seconds and I have thought about it every week since.

Because a thing that needs a second volume is not a project any more. A project has an extent. This has a direction.

And the direction is out — east across the creek, and north up the schist, and one day, if the account of the rock is right, south into whatever stands in the low Twenties over a parking garage. Nine houses became seventeen in eight years without anybody drawing a line, and Volume II has one form in it now and will not always, and I am fifty-one years old and I keep a shelf.

I have begun, privately, in a notebook that is not a municipal document, to keep a third list. It has no forms and no fields. It is a list of places in the other four boroughs and in the counties beyond them where two of the seventeen can be in flower at once and in sight of one another.

There are, at the last count, sixty-one of them.

XLIV. What the Seedlings Do Not Have

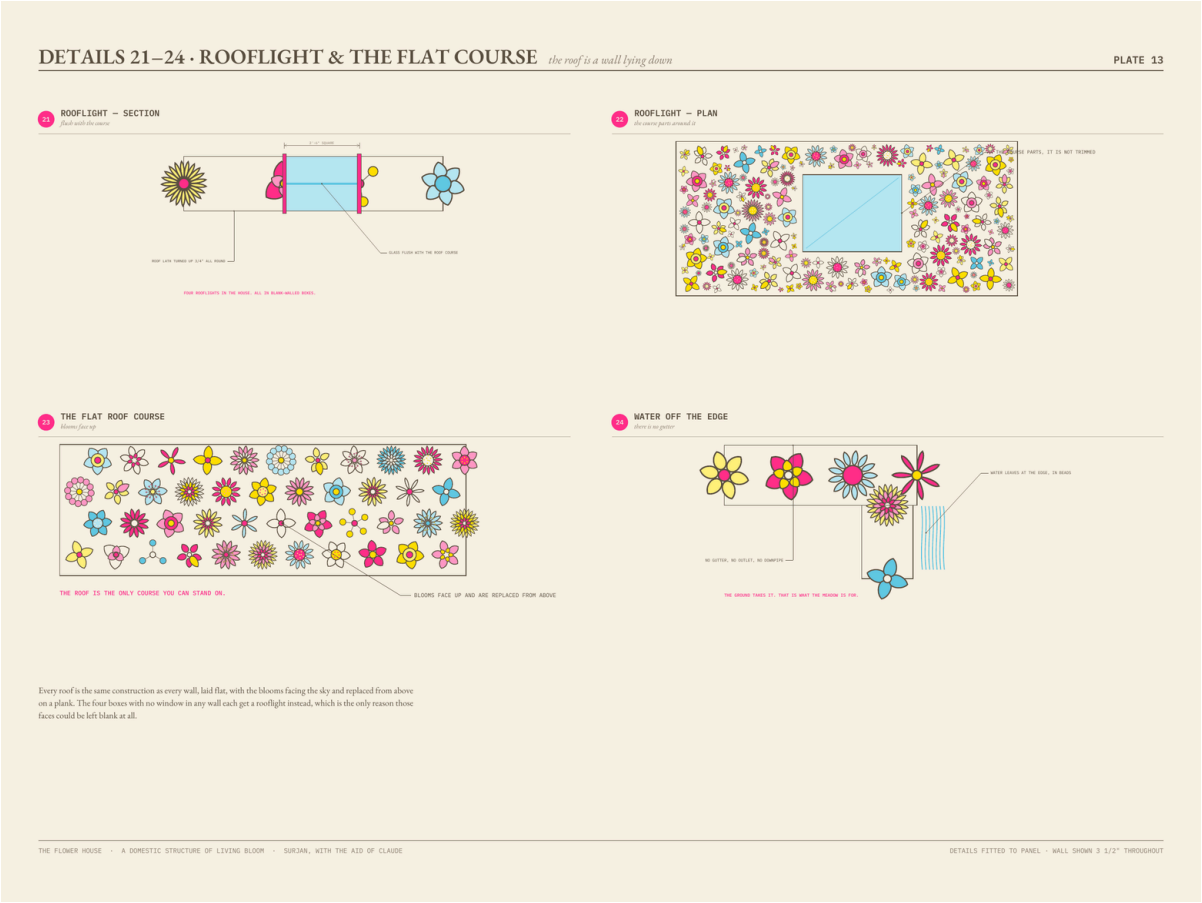

DETAILS 21–24 · ROOFLIGHT & THE FLAT COURSE
the roof is a wall lying down
PLATE 13
21 ROOFLIGHT — SECTION
Flush with the course
GLASS FLUSH WITH THE ROOF COURSE
FOUR ROOFLIGHTS IN THE HOUSE. ALL IN BLANK-WALLED BOXES.
22 ROOFLIGHT — PLAN
the course parts around it
THE GLASS PARTS. IT IS NOT TRIMMED
23 THE FLAT ROOF COURSE
blooms face up
THE ROOF IS THE ONLY COURSE YOU CAN STAND ON.
BLOOMS FACE UP AND ARE REPLACED FROM ABOVE
24 WATER OFF THE EDGE
there is no gutter
WATER LEAVES AT THE EDGE, IN BEADS
NO GUTTER, NO OUTLET, NO DOWNPIPE
THE GROUND TAKES IT. THAT IS WHAT THE MEADOW IS FOR.
Every roof is the same construction as every wall, laid flat, with the blooms facing the sky and replaced from above on a plank. The four boxes with no window in any wall each get a rooflight instead, which is the only reason those faces could be left blank at all.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DETAILS FITTED TO PANEL · WALL SHOWN 3 1/2" THROUGHOUT

PLATE 13 · WEST ELEVATION. Three round windows appear on this face and nowhere else in the house.

The eight seedlings carry the species of their parents, the wall thickness of their parents, the three-foot gap, the flat roof, the paper-thin edge and, in six cases out of eight, a round window on a west face.

They do not carry openings.

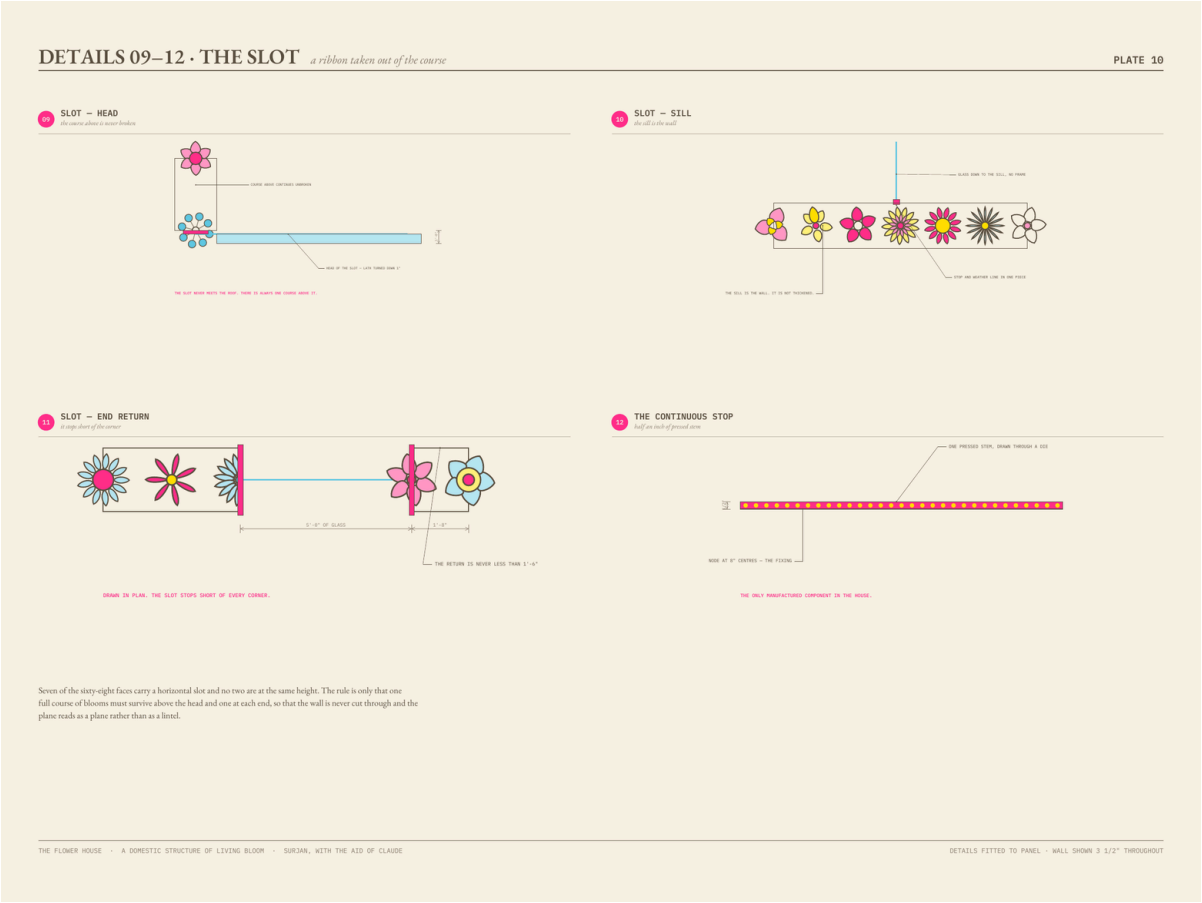

DETAILS 09–12 · THE SLOT a ribbon taken out of the course
PLATE 10
09 SLOT — HEAD
the course above is never broken
10 SLOT — SILL
the sill is the wall
11 SLOT — END RETURN
it stops short of the corner
12 THE CONTINUOUS STOP
half an inch of pressed stem
DRAWN IN PLAN. THE SLOT STOPS SHORT OF EVERY CORNER.
THE ONLY MANUFACTURED COMPONENT IN THE HOUSE.
Seven of the sixty-eight faces carry a horizontal slot and no two are at the same height. The rule is only that one full course of blooms must survive above the head and one at each end, so that the wall is never cut through and the plane reads as a plane rather than as a lintel.
THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
DETAILS FITTED TO PANEL · WALL SHOWN 3 1/2" THROUGHOUT

PLATE 10 · DETAILS 09–12 · THE SLOT. One full course of blooms must survive above the head and one at each end. The seedlings do none of this.

This is the finding of the eleventh year and it is the one that has unsettled the architects rather than the public. Every one of the eight has, on every face, an opening of a single kind: a plain rectangle, roughly central, roughly two-thirds of the wall, with a sill at about knee height. The same one. Sixty-two faces on eight buildings and one hole repeated sixty-two times.

The nine parents have twelve kinds between them and use them so that no box repeats itself on its own four faces and no head line runs from one box to the next. That refusal of pattern is the most laboured decision in the whole project; three separate architects worked at it for years; it is the thing the drawings are proudest of.

And it did not pass down. Not once, in eight children.

What passed down is everything that is structural, everything that is species, everything that is dimension, and nothing whatever that is composition. The seedlings have inherited the house and not the design.

I have shown this to the architect of three of the nine, who is not a man given to being quiet, and he was quiet for some time and then said that it was the first honest review the project had ever had.

I do not think it is a review. I think it is a statement about what a building is when nobody is deciding, and I think the answer is that it is a wall with a hole in it, which is what a building has been for eleven thousand years, and that the other eleven kinds of hole are a thing that only happens when somebody is in the room.

The seedlings are not worse. Six of them are, in the judgement of the Bloom Watch, more robust than their parents. The Stair at Fort Tryon takes nine hundred people a day through it in July and has never lost a course.

But they are all the same, and the nine are not, and there is exactly one difference between the two groups, and the difference is us.

CODA · INSTRUCTIONS FOR A VISITOR

Being the whole of the practical advice this Register is competent to give.

Go in February.

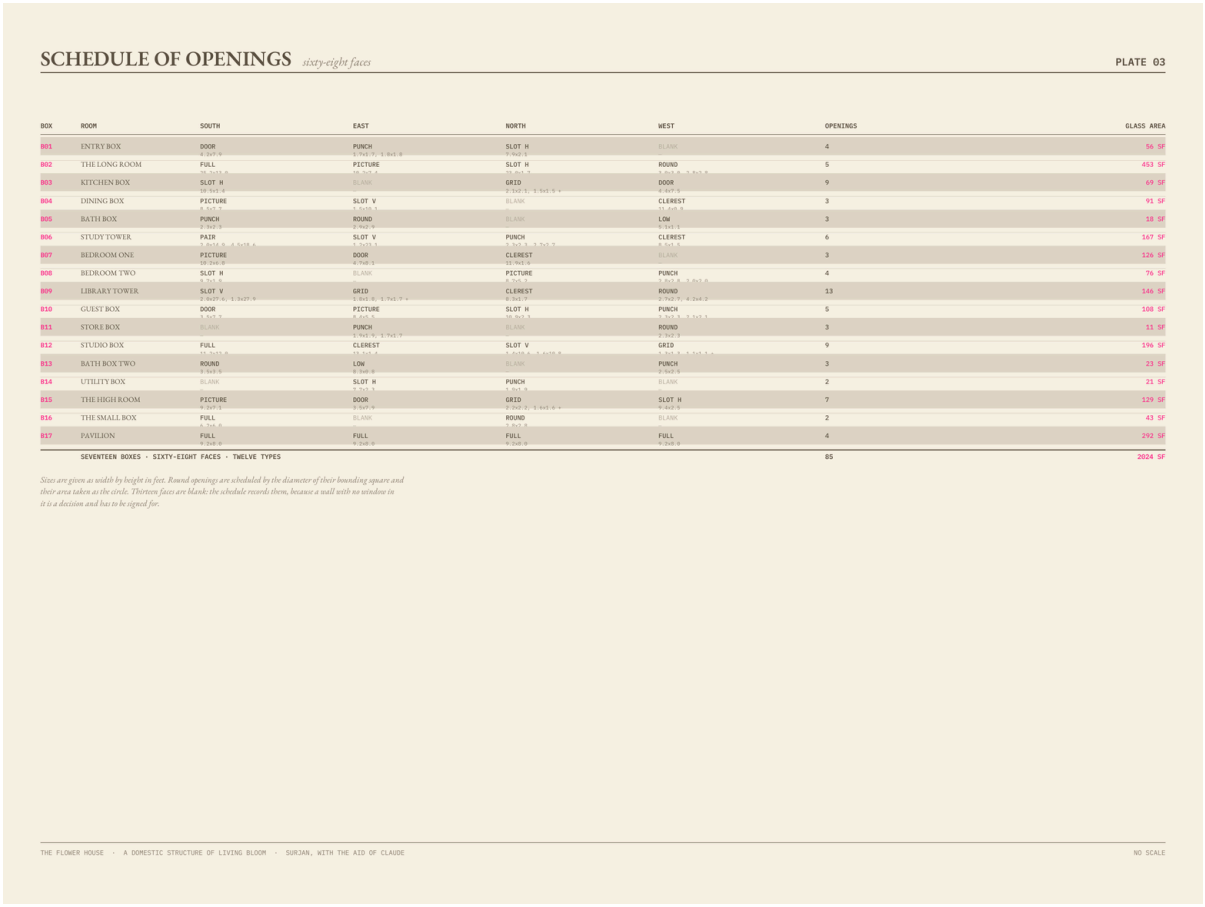
Everyone will tell you to go in July, and in July they are extraordinary and you will take a photograph and the photograph will be of colour. Go in February. Wear a coat. The buildings will be lath and glass and a hole where a window was, and you will be able to see them, which you cannot do at any other time of year.

Stand across the street. Do not try to go in. Eight of the nine are private houses with families in them and the ninth is a pier stub that is shut, and the whole design of this city's relationship to these buildings rests on the fact that nobody is admitted and nobody minds.

Look at the gaps. They are the plan. The boxes are only what the grass has been asked to go around.

Then go back in June, or July, or August, whichever feast day you can get to, and stand in the crowd. Do not stand at the front. The front is for the people from the block. Stand at the back, where the people are who have come across the city on two trains to look at the outside of a house.

Listen for the moment when someone reads out the species — one for each year the house has stood, aloud, in Latin, usually badly. It takes about a minute. Nobody claps at the end of it. Everybody waits.



SCHEDULE OF OPENINGS *sixty-eight faces*

PLATE 03

BOX	ROOM	SOUTH	EAST	NORTH	WEST	OPENINGS	GLASS AREA
B01	ENTRY BOX	DOOR 4.2x7.9	PUNCH 1.9x1.7, 1.8x1.8	SLOT H 7.9x2.1	BLANK	4	56 SF
B02	THE LONG ROOM	FULL 28.2x13.0	PICTURE 28.2x3.2	SLOT H 28.2x1.0	ROUND 5.8x5.8, 3.8x3.8	5	453 SF
B03	KITCHEN BOX	SLOT H 10.4x1.0	BLANK	GRID 2.1x2.1, 1.6x1.9 ×	DOOR 4.8x7.9	9	69 SF
B04	DINING BOX	PICTURE 8.1x5.3	SLOT V 1.0x10.1	BLANK	CLEREST 11.4x0.9	3	91 SF
B05	BATH BOX	PUNCH 2.9x2.0	ROUND 2.9x2.9	BLANK	LOW 5.1x1.1	3	18 SF
B06	STUDY TOWER	PAIR 5.0x14.0, 4.5x18.4	SLOT V 1.1x19.1	PUNCH 5.1x1.3, 3.7x2.7	CLEREST 8.4x1.3	6	167 SF
B07	BEDROOM ONE	PICTURE 10.2x6.0	DOOR 4.7x8.1	CLEREST 11.4x1.0	BLANK	3	126 SF
B08	BEDROOM TWO	SLOT H 5.7x1.0	BLANK	PICTURE 4.7x5.1	PUNCH 1.8x2.8, 1.8x3.0	4	76 SF
B09	LIBRARY TOWER	SLOT V 2.0x27.9, 1.3x27.9	GRID 5.0x1.0, 1.7x1.7 ×	CLEREST 6.5x1.7	ROUND 2.7x2.7, 4.2x4.2	13	146 SF
B10	GUEST BOX	DOOR 3.1x7.1	PICTURE 3.1x5.3	SLOT H 10.0x2.1	PUNCH 3.1x1.1, 2.1x2.1	5	108 SF
B11	STORE BOX	BLANK	PUNCH 1.9x1.9, 1.7x1.7	BLANK	ROUND 2.1x2.1	3	11 SF
B12	STUDIO BOX	FULL 11.1x13.0	CLEREST 11.1x1.1	SLOT V 1.0x19.1, 1.1x19.0	GRID 5.1x1.1, 1.1x1.1 ×	9	196 SF
B13	BATH BOX TWO	ROUND 3.6x3.6	LOW 4.1x0.9	BLANK	PUNCH 2.0x2.0	3	23 SF
B14	UTILITY BOX	BLANK	SLOT H 5.7x1.0	PUNCH 1.8x1.8	BLANK	2	21 SF
B15	THE HIGH ROOM	PICTURE 9.2x9.2	DOOR 3.0x7.9	GRID 2.0x2.2, 1.6x1.6 ×	SLOT H 9.6x2.5	7	129 SF
B16	THE SMALL BOX	FULL 5.1x6.0	BLANK	ROUND 3.0x3.0	BLANK	2	43 SF
B17	PAVILION	FULL 9.2x8.0	FULL 9.2x8.0	FULL 9.2x8.0	FULL 9.2x8.0	4	292 SF
	SEVENTEEN BOXES · SIXTY-EIGHT FACES · TWELVE TYPES					85	2024 SF

Sizes are given as width by height in feet. Round openings are scheduled by the diameter of their bounding square and their area taken as the circle. Thirteen faces are blank; the schedule records them, because a wall with no window in it is a decision and has to be signed for.

THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

NO SCALE

PLATE 03 · SCHEDULE OF OPENINGS. Thirteen faces are blank. A wall with no window in it is a decision and has to be signed for.

And if you are here in the second week of December, on the day the last of the course comes off the Traffic Island in a wind off the river, then go and stand on the median at 106th Street at about four in the afternoon, and you will find perhaps thirty people there, in the dark, in the traffic, not saying anything.

That is not a feast day. There is no name for it and Hector's book does not record it and the Bloom Watch does not report it. It is thirty people watching a building stop.

They will all be back in May.

AFTERWORD

By Surjan. Written in February, away from the island, in the eleven weeks.

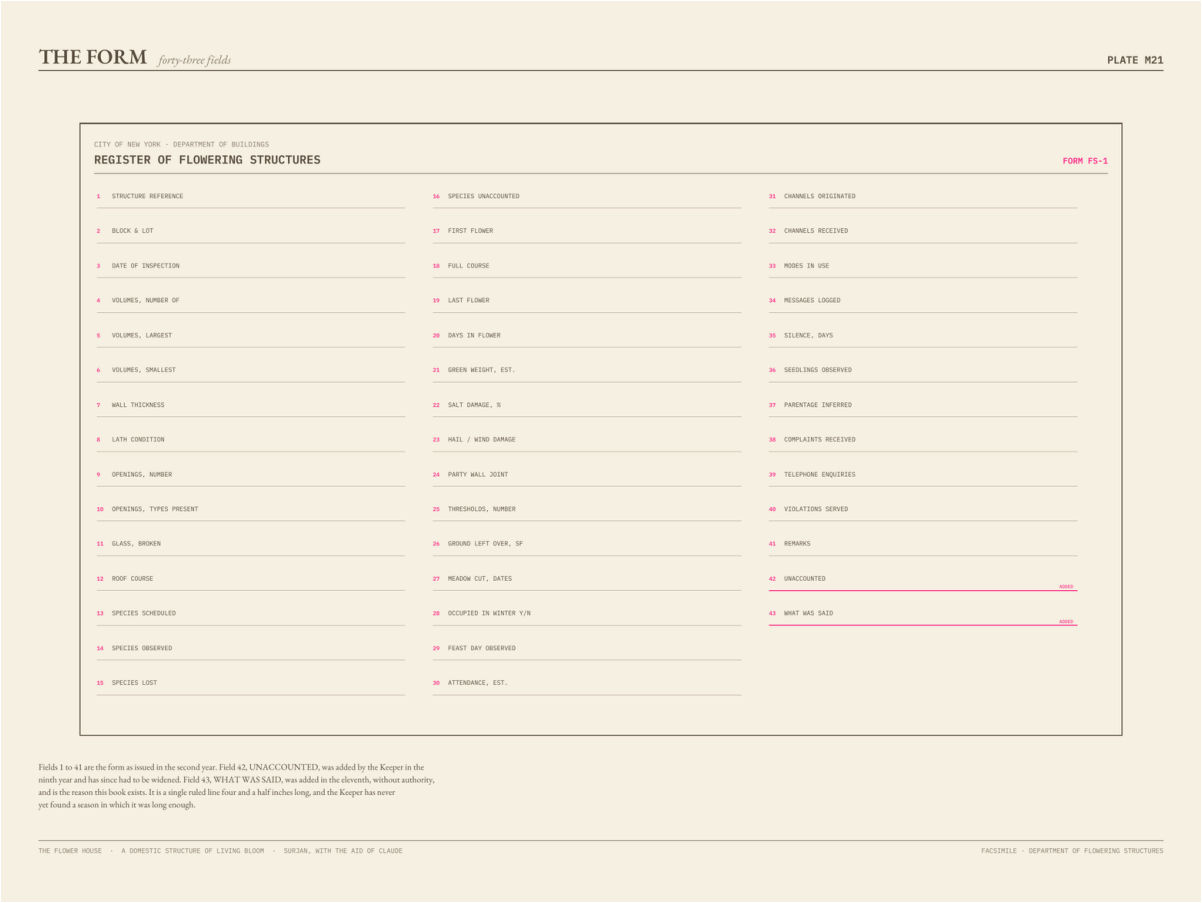
It is the middle of the eleven weeks as I write this. I know exactly what the nine houses look like today without being in that city, because I have seen it eleven times and because it is the same every year: lath, glass, a hole where a window was, and about four hundred flowers still hanging on somewhere they were sheltered, which nobody photographs.

The Keeper's Register ends with an instruction to visit in February. I want to end somewhere else, because he has said the useful thing and I only have the personal one.

Here is what has happened to me over eleven years, set down as plainly as I can manage.

I made a building that was allowed to end, because at the time I could not bear a building that would not. That was the whole of my reasoning and it was, I now see, entirely about myself. I was not thinking about a city. I was not thinking about a family carrying boxes into a van in December while two hundred people applauded. I was thinking about the granite at the end of my street and about eleven months in a room, and I made a small white box with a hole in it because I needed one to exist.

And then other people took it, and it stopped being mine, and that is the part nobody prepares you for.


THE FORM *forty-three fields* PLATE M21

CITY OF NEW YORK · DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS

REGISTER OF FLOWERING STRUCTURES FORM FS-1

1 STRUCTURE REFERENCE
2 BLOCK & LOT
3 DATE OF INSPECTION
4 VOLUMES, NUMBER OF
5 VOLUMES, LARGEST
6 VOLUMES, SMALLEST
7 WALL THICKNESS
8 LATH CONDITION
9 OPENINGS, NUMBER
10 OPENINGS, TYPES PRESENT
11 GLASS, BROKEN
12 ROOF COURSE
13 SPECIES SCHEDULED
14 SPECIES OBSERVED
15 SPECIES LOST
16 SPECIES UNACCOUNTED
17 FIRST FLOWER
18 FULL COURSE
19 LAST FLOWER
20 DAYS IN FLOWER
21 GREEN WEIGHT, EST.
22 SALT DAMAGE, %
23 HAIL / WIND DAMAGE
24 PARTY WALL JOINT
25 THRESHOLDS, NUMBER
26 GROUND LEFT OVER, SF
27 MEADOW CUT, DATES
28 OCCUPIED IN WINTER Y/N
29 FEAST DAY OBSERVED
30 ATTENDANCE, EST.
31 CHANNELS ORIGINATED
32 CHANNELS RECEIVED
33 MODES IN USE
34 MESSAGES LOGGED
35 SILENCE, DAYS
36 SEEDLINGS OBSERVED
37 PARENTAGE INFERRED
38 COMPLAINTS RECEIVED
39 TELEPHONE ENQUIRIES
40 VIOLATIONS SERVED
41 REMARKS
42 UNACCOUNTED ADDED
43 WHAT WAS SAID ADDED

Fields 1 to 41 are the form as issued in the second year. Field 42, UNACCOUNTED, was added by the Keeper in the ninth year and has since had to be widened. Field 43, WHAT WAS SAID, was added in the eleventh, without authority, and is the reason this book exists. It is a single ruled line four and a half inches long, and the Keeper has never yet found a season in which it was long enough.

THE FLOWER HOUSE · A DOMESTIC STRUCTURE OF LIVING BLOOM · SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE FACSIMILE · DEPARTMENT OF FLOWERING STRUCTURES

PLATE M21 · THE FORM. Field 43, WHAT WAS SAID, was added in the eleventh year without authority. It is a single ruled line four and a half inches long.

I did not design six of the nine. I did not find the post. I did not name the feast days, and I have never been to seven of them. I have never met Hector Salgado. I have been on the waiting list for the Night of the Narrow since the third year and I am, by my own calculation, about four years from the front, and when a journalist offered in the seventh year to arrange something I said no with a violence that surprised us both.

I do not want to be let in. The whole worth of the thing is that nobody is let in except by the book.

What I have instead is this. Twice a year I fly to New York and I stand across the street from a building I drew and I do not tell anybody I drew it. I have stood in the crowd at the Great Mowing four times and heard a child read out species names in bad Latin and I have never once said a word. I have been asked, at the back of that crowd, by a man with a folding chair, whether I knew what the flowers on the third box were called, and I said I thought they were a kind of poppy, and he said no, and told me, and was right.

That is the best professional experience of my life. I want that on the record too.

There is a thing architects say to each other about buildings outliving them, and it is meant as consolation and it has always sounded to me like a threat. The bank at the end of my street will outlive everybody; that is exactly what I could not stand about it. What I did not understand at thirty-eight and understand now is that there is another way for a building to go on, and it is not by lasting.

It is by being repeated. By ending, on a schedule, in public, and by having enough people care about the ending that they arrange to be there for the return. The nine houses have not lasted eleven years. They have happened eleven times. There is a difference and it is the whole difference, and a woman on a telephone found the words for it before I did when she said, about a roof she has never seen: I know it's only a roof.

She meant the opposite. She meant: I know what I am doing and I am doing it anyway. Which is the correct posture toward everything that matters and cannot be kept.

I said in the introduction that I would use the word once and not again, and I have used it, and I will not.

But I will say the thing underneath it, which I have not said in print before and which is the reason this book has an introduction and an afterword by a man who did not write any of the middle.

When somebody dies, the world does not stop being beautiful; it stops being reliable. That is the actual injury. Things you had assumed would be there are not there, and the not-being-there is permanent and silent and gives you nothing to do.

What I wanted — and I did not know I wanted it until I had drawn it — was a thing that would go away and come back. Not a thing that lasts. A thing that goes away, completely, so that you feel it, and then comes back, on time, so that you learn that some absences end.

Nine of them now, in one city, on nine pieces of ground nobody wanted. And eight more that arrived on their own, which is the part I have no professional opinion about and the part I think about most.

They will all be back in May. That is not a hope. It is a scheduled municipal fact, recorded on a form with forty-three fields, kept in a room and a half on the ninth floor of a building on Chambers Street, by a man who has never met me and to whom this whole book properly belongs.

SURJAN

FEBRUARY

COLOPHON

This volume comprises the Register of Flowering Structures, Volumes I and II, together with a foreword by Dr Ileana Cortázar-Weiss of the Botanical Garden, and an introduction and an afterword by the architect of three of the nine houses.

The plates are of two kinds. Those numbered in arabic are working drawings from the design set for Site 01 and its companions: plans, sections, elevations, schedules of species and of openings, and twenty-eight construction details. Those numbered with the prefix M are the Register's own, prepared by the Keeper and drawn out for this edition: the pollen post, the matrix of channels, the root network, the hour of the bee, the drift of species, the calendar of the nine, the growing of a wall, the nine in February, eleven years of first flower, the salt, the hail of the sixth year, the book of Hector Salgado, the eleven species that do not exist, what can be seen from where, the seedlings and their island, the nine feast days, the nine accounts, the tenth house, and the form.

Set in EB Garamond throughout. The drawings are made in the practice's standing palette: paper, warm taupe, yellow, magenta and sky. No black is used anywhere in this book, in any plate, at any weight. This is not a stylistic preference. There is no black in a flower.

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

The Register of Flowering Structures · Department of Buildings · City of New York